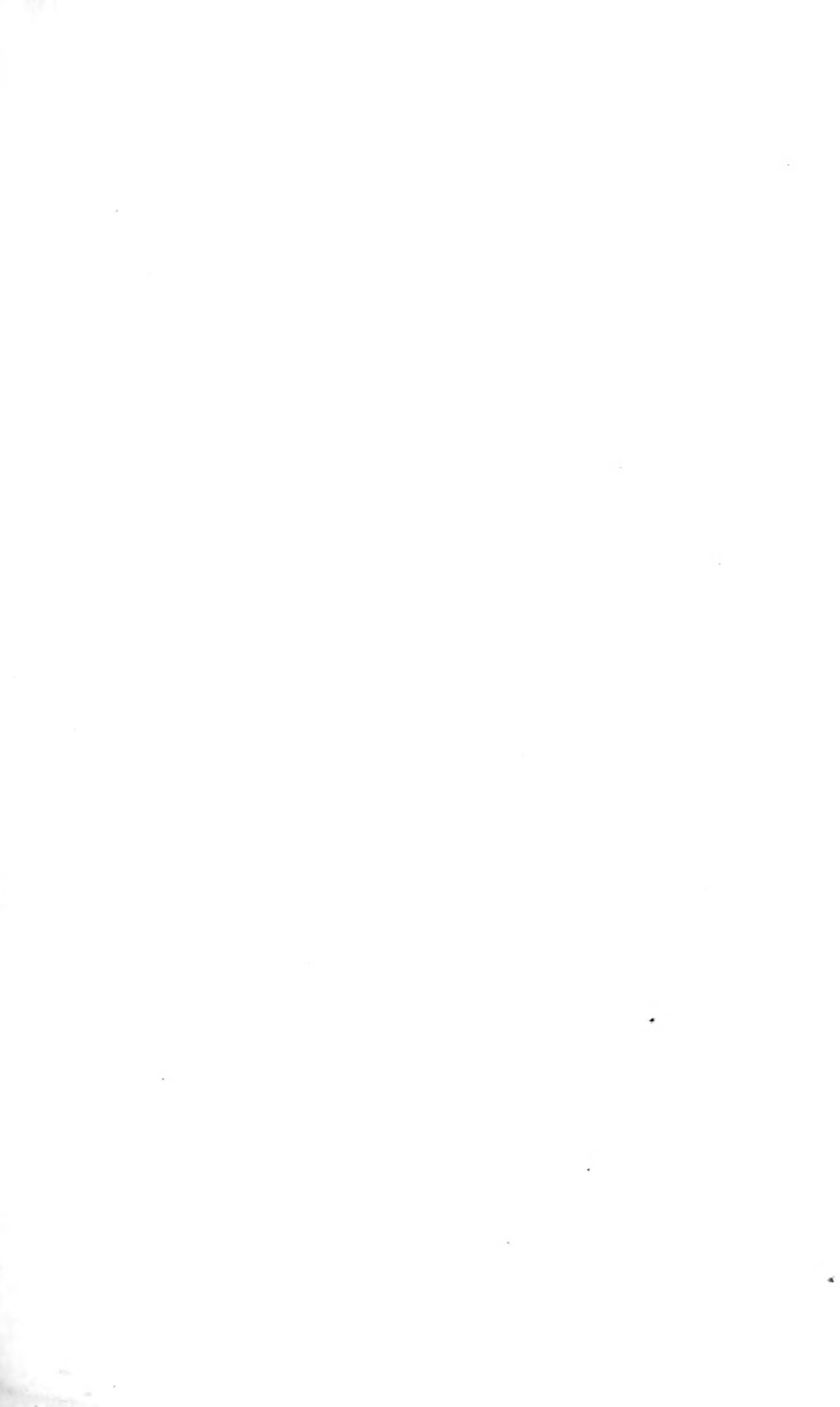


*Number 49
Tinkham Street*



C. Emma Cheney



NUMBER 49 TINKHAM STREET



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TINKHAM STREET

BY

C. EMMA CHENEY

AUTHOR OF

"YOUNG FOLKS' HISTORY OF THE CIVIL WAR"

"The man who belongs nowhere belongs to me, and I must
give account of him"



CHICAGO

A. C. McCLURG AND COMPANY

1895

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A. D. 1895

TO
MY SISTER.

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NUMBER 49 TINKHAM STREET.

CHAPTER I.

TWO DOGS AND THEIR MASTERS.

“**H**ERE, Spero ! Spero ! come here, sir !”
commanded Robert.

On went the wilful old dog, pretending not to hear. His master whistled and called in vain. Then he began to run. Spero ran faster still.

Piccolo stood at “attention,” — motionless, silent, showing his white teeth. His clear-cut long ears stood sharply up. Along his brindly yellow spine every hair bristled in defiance. Not a muscle of his plebeian tail relaxed in friendly wag. Spero’s memory was playing him false. He thought only of youthful victories, when to recall the smart of some late defeat would have served him better. So he skirmished closer and

closer to the enemy's lines, — much closer indeed than safety warranted. Blind to danger, deaf to threat or entreaty, Spero barked furiously, kicking up the dirt with his ragged hind legs, as he waved his plummy tail, like a frond of Pampas grass, in challenge.

There is a point beyond which even a pampered Skye may not with impunity trespass upon the freehold of a common yellow dog. In an evil moment aggressive, blustering Spero crossed that line. A nose too near, a growl too long, and war was declared. A struggle, a yelp, a howl, a fluff of silken hair, and all was over. Poor Spero had surrendered at discretion. What now did it matter that he had set out in full toilet, — silver collar, and coat to match? As he limped away bleeding, his pain was not the less hard to bear because of his brave gear. And as to Piccolo, although a smart kick from his master had sent him off crestfallen, in his heart he knew that he was a victor. On the deserted field, only two boys regarded each other.

"You had no right to set your dog on mine," said Robert, fiercely.

"Oh, you-a thing me, I'm 'fraid," derided Piccolo's master.

"Well, your dog picked the quarrel."

"You-a dog ees-a firs' peek qua'l. He ees-a god-a good w'ip."

"Spero is old and almost blind. You ought

to be ashamed of yourself," cried Robert, his little fist instinctively tightening.

"Ha! Me, I'm-a no not shame."

"You're a bully. I'll not talk to you."

"You, you'selve, lill-a baby." The elder boy's white teeth flashed exasperatingly.

Robert sprang upon him with the fury of a wildcat. With one hand the Italian warded off the blows that pattered on his head, and with the other he held one of Robert's wrists in a vicelike grip. The bruise over Robert's eye was inflicted rather in self-defence than in retaliation, but the pain was not the less exasperating to the angry child.

"Say, lill-a keed, bedda spick weeth you-a dog. Ees god-a somethæen the matter weeth-a 'im," he said at last.

Robert's anger was suddenly cooled. In avenging Spero's wrongs he had overlooked the old fellow's sufferings. Michele was right, for the dog lay in a ragged little heap, whining miserably. Grieved and ashamed, his master lifted him up tenderly and went away, — both wiser and sadder than an hour before when they set out to seek adventure.

"Where's mother?" asked Robert, as Hannah opened the door to admit him, when he reached home.

"I don't know. She's out somewheres'r 'nuther," replied the woman. "But what on

airth is the matter enny how, I sh'd like to know? "

"We've had a big row, — Spero and I."

"I never!" exclaimed Hannah.

"I never did before, and I never will again," admitted Robert, trying to brave it out.

"Sh'd think as like as not you won't," she retorted grimly. "Yer ma won't be none too proud of ye, I guess. Ye've got a black eye fur yer pains. Who under the sun did ye find ter fight ye?"

Robert suddenly became conscious of deep disgrace. He had been engaged in a street brawl with an Italian organ-grinder. Remorse settled about him like a fog.

"Will you please help me fix Spero's leg?" he asked humbly.

Hannah was touched by such an appeal — the more so that Robert was not often in lowly mood. She was very patient with both dog and master as she washed and bandaged the disabled member, wishing in her heart to comfort them, yet not quite sure of the right to do so.

"I b'leeve it's broke," she said, thinking aloud.

"Oh, Hannah. I could not bear that! Wiggle it a little, just to see," wept the child.

"No, 't ain't reely broke, but jest 's like 's not he'll run mad," she continued. "S'pose you git the almanac an' less see if it's the new o' the moon."

"Would it be better to have it broken then, Hannah?"

"Well, child, I dunno's it makes much difference. Less see. If it's the new o' the moon, it'll be — What is that there verse? I disremember it now."

"If Spero dies I'll never forgive that horrid, mean old Italian, as long as I live," declared Robert, fiercely.

"Well, I never! I should n't want to be so wicked's to say that, after all's said an' done. 'It costs more to revenge wrongs than to bear 'em,' 's the ol' sayin' is. You'd better git Spero's basket an' put him in it, 'nstead o' settin' down a threat'nin' what you'll do."

Robert soon returned with the basket, and together they placed the dog in it.

"Oh, Hannah! He's shivering. Do you suppose he is cold?" asked the anxious little master.

"Prob'ly he's got a nager-chill," was the reassuring reply.

"Do dogs die of them?"

"They ain't healthy fer ennybody," evasively.

"I do wish mother would come home," moaned Robert.

"'Pears ter me ye're in a mighty hurry ter make yer ma happy." Hannah had relapsed into her severest mood. "I never! 'f you was my boy I'd git a nuss fer ye, an' 'nuther fer yer

dog. One 's too young, an' t 'other 's too old to go out fightin' by yerselves, I sh 'd think."

Dearly though she loved the sinner, she feared to compromise with naughtiness by failing to denounce the sin. When Spero had been made as comfortable as the present state of his anatomy would permit, and Robert as presentable as possible, with a piece of raw beef bound over his eye, the good woman returned to the kitchen leaving the friends to meditate. If they had listened, they might have heard her cracked and quavering voice singing : —

" Let dogs delight to bark and bite,
For God hath made them so
Let bears and lions growl and fight,
For 't is their nature too.

" But, children, you should never let
Your angry passions rise ;
Your little hands were never made
To tear each other's eyes."

To Robert it seemed a long while before he heard his mother's step in the hall. The next moment he wished she had not come so soon.

" Mother, something awful has happened," he began as soon as he saw her. " Spero and I have had a terrible fight."

" Fight, Robert?"

" Yes, and the worst of it is we were both whipped, too. But they were both bigger than

we are," he added quickly, with flashing eye that did not keep his lip from trembling.

She drew him into her lap and he poured out the whole miserable story. He kept nothing back. There was no attempt at extenuation, or shirking the blame. There were traces of the conflict upon Robert's jacket, and traces of tears on his bruised face, to confirm every statement. As if to corroborate the testimony, Spero whined feebly in his basket. Mrs. Trumbull hastened to administer the coveted petting to the old fellow, who was jealously fond of her.

"Well, dear, what are you going to do about this?" she asked at length.

"That's the trouble," answered the boy, "I'm not going to ask an organ-grinder's pardon, that 's certain."

"You did not mind fighting with an organ-grinder."

"Well, I was n't half so much to blame as he was."

"What did he do?"

"He — he called me names."

"And you?"

"Why, I hit him hard, and I said he was a bully, — and he was, too." Robert sat erect, his eye kindling with the remembrance.

"Oh, my son! Do you think your father would have done that?"

"N — n — no, I don't think he would, but

Spero did n't mean anything. 'Course he did n't know any better than to bark at a strange dog."

"The dogs have settled their quarrel already, dear."

"Besides, I do not know where he lives."

"Don't you think you could find him?"

"Well, I 'm not afraid of him, any way."

"I should think not, after the way he has treated you. Perhaps he is afraid of you." A smile flickered across Robert's tear-stained face as he turned to look at her. Then he was silent for a long while.

"Well," he said at last, drawing a long breath, "I'm willing to 'change forgivenesses with that — boy if he wants to."

"Ask his, Robert, and you will be doing your part. Never mind his."

"All right, mother! I may get mad if he is real mean about it, but I 'll try awfully hard not to."

"That is spoken like a gentleman, and if —"

"It 's a dretful pity 't Spero's lost his new collar," interrupted Hannah. "You won't never see hide nor hair on 't, nuther. Prob'ly that thievin' feller stole it off 'n his neck when you warn't a lookin'."

"He could n't, for I was looking all the while. I 'll ask him about it when I see him again."

"See him agin! I never! You'd better let

well 'nough 'lone, an' him too, 'f you want my 'pinion."

Anybody could have guessed what they would call the baby, when Robert was born. The namē was foreordained, and fitted like a glove, though the one was new and the other old. Before his blue eyes had ceased to blink at the light of day, he had been properly classified, and labelled "Robert Trumbull, junior," — namesake and pride of his father, who had honored the name in the wearing. Never was royal heir more welcome to his kingdom than this little lodger to the happy home which was waiting for him. It ill became Robert Trumbull, senior, to praise the child's beauty, since he was a droll little copy of the father, even to the bald head fringed with hair that in courtesy was called "golden." But Hannah declared that he was as "folksy baby's ever lived," and if the mother said nothing, one glance at her radiant face told the story so far as she was concerned.

Of all the household, one alone maintained a hostile attitude toward the new-comer. Standing on his hind legs at the nurse's knee, Spero coldly surveyed his rival in the affection and attention of his master and mistress. He sniffed disdainfully whenever the baby cried, — for truth forbids the biographer to declare that Robert suffered the ills of infancy without a murmur. However, whether from a sense of duty or from natural curi-

osity, Spero watched with interest the proceedings in the nursery, quitting his post only on rare occasions when Hannah decoyed him to the back-yard with a hint of a cat a-field. But his shaggy coat hid a loyal heart which could not brook for long such strained relations with any member of his master's family. So it came to pass, that even before the baby was emancipated from long clothes Spero had declared a truce to jealousy, and before Robert's wabbling little legs could carry him, dog and boy were one in thought and purpose. Naturally, each was blind to the other's faults, for even such jolly good fellows were by no means perfect. Spero would not hesitate to steal a bone and carry it joyously to gnaw on the best chair in the drawing-room, and Robert was naughty enough to convince those who loved him that he was not chosen of the gods. That both possessed many virtues, cannot be gainsaid. "Harnsum is that harnsum does," comforted Hannah when Robert indignantly resented some cruel slur on Spero's rough exterior and veiled eyes. And Spero would wail dismally if his little master deigned to stroke another dog, or indeed if Robert petted any other living creature, in his dogly presence.

But notwithstanding the love that brooded over this happy home, one dark day the wings of a great sorrow overshadowed it. While Robert was yet a little lad, scarcely able to lisp the word

“father,” he was left to bear alone the name of Robert Trumbull. Too young to comprehend his loss, his mother tried to teach him to deserve the name which he inherited. For her sake he tried to be thoughtful and gentle. For her son’s sake she bore herself bravely, hiding from him the knowledge of her loneliness. Both failed. Both succeeded. Who shall say that both were not the better for the effort?





CHAPTER II.

THE ACCIDENT OF AN ACCIDENT.

THERE was nothing half-hearted about Robert. He could provoke unmercifully, he could love tenderly, he could hate ferociously, he could forgive wholly. One day when his thoughts were far remote from his encounter with the Italian and his dog, Robert caught a strain of the "Marseillaise" sputtering in tuneful explosions over the barrel of a hand-organ. Now a hand-organ was Robert's dear delight, and the "Marseillaise" was its prophet. He stopped to listen, then quickening his pace he soon found himself face to face with Piccolo's master, and, indeed, with Piccolo himself, who smelled suspiciously at Robert's heels.

"March on, march on, O ye bra—" It stopped, cutting a note in two in the middle.

"Hello, lill-a keed!" saluted the musician.

"Hullo!" returned Robert heartily, beginning

to think the other not such a bad fellow, after all.

“Ees-a you-a ol’ dog feel-a sig?”

Robert was determined to keep his temper, and replied pleasantly.

“Oh, he ’s well again.”

“Loog-a ligue ees die.”

Robert winced.

“What ’s your name?” he asked.

“Michele Caputo. Wad-a name haf you?”

“Robert Trumbull. Say, Mike — how do you pronounce it?”

“Dass all-a righd. Dey spick eet ‘Moike.’” He was laughing.

“Well, Mike, I am sorry I hit you so hard that time,” faltered Robert. “Please excuse me.”

“Jus’-a mague-a lill fun. No hurt notheen, — so lill-a couldn’,” Mike returned with unnecessary candor, showing his white teeth.

For the moment Robert wished that he had hurt him, so lightly did the elder boy esteem the overtures which had cost great searchings of heart. Indeed it is doubtful if Robert’s forbearance was equal to much greater tension, unsustained by the dramatic element by which he had expected the interview to be characterized. Perhaps in some vague form this feeling took shape, for he hastened to ask, —

“Have you found a little silver collar marked ‘*Dum Spiro Spero*’? My dog lost it the — other day.”

"No, me, I 'm-a don' foun' lill-a coll."

"Well, will you please keep it for me if you do find it?"

"Yas, goin'-a keep eet."

"Thank you."

As Robert turned away the organ proceeded to complete its interrupted strain. He stopped, in evident enjoyment of the performance, to hear it out.

"Loaf-a you-a, you'selve play organ?" asked the Italian, good-naturedly, stepping aside to make room for Robert.

Of course Robert wished it, and he said so, but he could not wait to-day, and he admitted that also, — very reluctantly, and more than half afraid of giving offence.

"To-mo'w?" suggested the artist.

Robert remembered that "to-morrow" would be Sunday. "I can't come to-morrow," he answered. Then he had an inspiration. "I'll tell you what, Mike, if you'll come to my Sunday-school to-morrow, I'll come here Monday."

"Wad ees-a de sun-da-cool?" drawled the Italian, indifferently.

"Oh, it's fine, and my teacher's just b-e-a-u-t-i-f-u-l."

"Oh, me, I-a don' wand."

"Please come," pleaded Robert, "there's lots of music."

The wary organ-grinder made no rash promises, but he smiled.

"Will you come? There's nothing to pay, and nothing to do — unless you want to," urged Robert.

"Cand-a no not fin'-a place."

"I'll show you. It's the little chapel next to the church with the tall spire over there. I'll be there. Will you come?"

Rather reluctantly Michele consented, and Robert went away satisfied.

The boys in Ruth Haven's Sunday-school class, belonged to the "first families," and the aristocracy of a large country town has its unwritten canons which may not with impunity be disregarded. It is true there were mixed classes in the school, and classes made up of gamins, pure and simple, but undoubtedly Ruth's was chosen from the very elect. Blue blood unadulterated was supposed to flow in their little veins. With most of them, even slang was tabooed at home, unless there happened to be some big brother in college, or sister engaged to some Englishman, which, however, was not often the case. For all these advantages Ruth hoped she was duly thankful.

One Sunday, flushed and radiant, Robert brought to the class a boy much older than himself. And such a boy! There was no denying it, he was a real "dago," and the other boys

with their nice manners and high-bred antecedents, did not scruple to call him so almost in his very hearing. Mischief lurked in every line of his fawn-colored face. Fun danced in his shining eyes. Even the tangles of his blue-black hair suggested Italy and brigandage. He wriggled into a seat beside Robert, who seemed as proud of his friend as a naturalist would be of a newly discovered insect. They had come in late,—a thing hitherto unheard-of on Robert's part. Ruth took no notice of that, but it was not all. The two boys giggled and whispered through the entire lesson, to the utter demoralization of the class. Ruth chose to ignore this also, rather than by rebuke to chill and repel the stranger whose appearance she gladly welcomed. She believed herself equal to maintaining order when that was more desirable than anything else, yet the present situation was embarrassing. She had often wished to take some part in the world's work, and now that the opportunity seemed to offer even in so small a way, she recognized it as heaven-sent.

"What is your name, my boy?" she asked after she had called the respectable roll in her class-book.

"Mike," promptly responded Robert. The other boys whispered behind their hands. A suppressed titter ran round the class. Ruth felt her cheek burning.

"Mike?" she repeated with an intonation of incredulity.

"Oh, that is not his real name, you know, but it is what the fellows call him," Robert vouchsafed eagerly.

"The fellows," indeed! Ruth glanced inquiringly at Robert, and in turn received an ineffable smile.

Again she asked the boy's name, — this time directly, and of the lad himself.

"Michele Caputo," spoken with an accent undoubted Italian.

"And where do you live?"

He shuffled his feet uneasily and did not reply. Ruth did not press the question.

The name did sound rather odd, and she smiled as she recorded it in that long list of good company. Before school was over Robert found the chance to whisper to her that Mike hoped to bring "another of 'em" next Sunday, asking confidently, —

"Are n't you glad, Miss Ruthy?" And she was honestly glad.

Michele did not come the next Sunday, nor the next, though Robert almost twisted his neck awry with watching for him. Robert was ready to excuse the Italian's absence on natural principles. He might have had to do something else, or it was possible that he had forgotten it; yet Robert confessed to having reminded him

of it every time they had met. He begged Ruth to look up her new pupil, which, to do her justice, she meant to do at the earliest possible moment. She kept her promise to herself so far at least as to pay more than one visit to the precincts which he daily haunted. To Ruth the world's work was too new to venture into the slums where Michele lived. But she invested a good deal of time and thought in pursuit of information, which went to prove that he certainly stood in sore need of friendly advice and correction.

When next Michele presented himself in Ruth's class, — a little reluctantly, too, Ruth thought, — it was in company with Robert. Again they whispered and laughed, not only between themselves but with their neighbors, regardless of an occasional reproving glance at Michele, and a decidedly emphatic "Robert!" addressed to the boy, who had never before transgressed the laws of propriety. Robert defended his own conduct, when she remonstrated with him afterward, on the ground that Mike did not see any use in coming to Sunday-school, and did not like to come because there was n't any fun going on; so he was trying to suit the programme to the audience. Ruth admitted to herself a morsel of wisdom in the boy's argument; but she reminded him that in his effort to please his friend, he was disturbing the class, and she assured him that as

she was responsible for making the place attractive, she must do it in her own way. Consenting, but scarcely convinced, and in consideration of Ruth's evident interest in Michele, Robert promised to keep the peace thereafter.





CHAPTER III.

THE JEWEL OF EXPERIENCE.

IN every pursuit, however trivial or however important, the mother and son found something in common. Whether it was a base-ball game, or a paper on art, books, music, people, or events, their interests were the same. Robert's pretty bedroom, so comfortable and dainty, was next his mother's. Her work-basket stood near his writing-desk in the pleasant library where they dreamed dreams and saw visions; and where, like the rest of us, they often built air-castles. Certainly, they were not limited in their choice of material, yet they would still have built, had they been reduced to sticks and clay.

It had come to be a custom for Robert to choose the treat for his own birthdays. This year it was to be a picnic, and the time was not far away, for Robert was a June child. Of course he was also to choose the guests, who

were to be those who would otherwise get no outing at all.

"Jest like his pa," Hannah complained. "He was allus a marster-hand at 'tendin' to poor folks b'fore ever he gin himself a thought. But poor folks in them days was diff'runt from what they be now, an' I can't say but what Robby'll run the business into the ground 'f he keeps on."

It was finally decided to ask Ellen, the old laundress, and her "seven;" Martin, the coachman's son; Jacky, the cripple who peddled notions; and the "Twins" at the "Home," who were so puny that nobody ever thought of adopting them.

"Then there is old Mrs. Beal," suggested Ruth. "She ain't 'ad no hairin' nor nothink since she demeaned herself by comin' to Ameriky."

"And Mike," said Robert. "He'll take his organ, and there'll be no end of fun."

"And Spero, — we cannot have a lark without Spero." Ruth patted the dog, who had taken occasion to remind her of his existence by settling himself on the folds of her skirt.

"We don't know the organ-grinder, Robert; and do you not think it would be better to ask him with the Sunday-school picnic?" asked Mrs. Trumbull.

"Well, I should think not, mother. Why, he has never seen the country. He did not even know what it was like."

"Oh, very well, dear. What sort of a boy is he, Ruth? He is in your class, is n't he?"

"Yes, when the mood suits him to be there. He has not a very good name, but we hope we shall help him to redeem it." Ruth smiled at Robert as she said this.

"I am afraid the advantage will be all on one side," returned the mother. "I wish Robert saw less of him."

"We cannot leave him out, mother. I asked him yesterday, but I did n't tell him all about it," Robert answered quickly.

After he had left the room, Mrs. Trumbull returned to the subject.

"I am sorry I persuaded Robert to ask that boy's pardon," she said. "Robert needed a lesson in self-control, and I thought this a good opportunity; but he has seemed infatuated with the Italian ever since, and it makes me very uneasy."

"I do not think you need worry about Robert. I cannot for one moment think that such a fellow as Michele could exercise a bad influence over him. I admire Robert's enthusiasm. His persistent effort to introduce Michele into a healthier atmosphere is refreshing."

"You say he has not a very good name. Do you know what he has done?"

Ruth hesitated, blushing; for she felt it unfair to inform against Michele, unheard.

"Why, it seems that the boy got mixed up in a gang of neighborhood roughs, who tried to use him for a tool to commit burglary. They were all caught, but Michele was pardoned because of his youth. Of course I do not pretend to excuse him, but he is ignorant and so young that I can't help hoping, through his evident affection for Robert, to win him to an honest life."

"Why, Ruth Haven! You astonish me. Do you not see that you are a sentimentalist, pure and simple? It is impossible. You do not count on the fact that this Italian is older in years than Robert, and is no doubt old in sin. It is an experiment too dangerous to be thought of."

"Well, Robert is your son. I love him dearly, but I must help Michele. You must choose the course for Robert, and I will cheerfully respect your decision."

Mrs. Trumbull sighed.

"I do not grudge the poor fellow an outing," she said, at last, "but if —"

"You would recall your invitation?"

"Gladly, if I could. It is too late for that, now that we have gone so far, but this must be the end so far as Robert's relations with him are concerned."

"There spake the mother," thought Ruth. "The woman would have been more generous."

The pleasure of inviting his guests was also to be a part of Robert's treat. As he was setting out

for that purpose the Saturday preceding the picnic, Tom Warren appeared with the news that the "Uplands" base-ball team had challenged their own "nine" to a contest at nine o'clock that morning. Robert urged the necessity of delivering his invitations at once, and after much discussion the young autocrat was constrained to accept a compromise and to postpone the game until ten. Robert had taken up his hat again, when his mother detained him.

"Will you wait a minute, dear?" she asked "I want you to mail an important letter for me at the post-office. It is very important, or I would not keep you."

It seemed a long minute to him, and he noticed that it took the little French clock on his mother's desk fully ten minutes to tick it away, working like mad. Possibly it might have taken less time had not the writer been so often interrupted with, —

"Please hurry up!" and, "Oh, mother dear, I shall be late."

Once off, however, he sped away to the "Home," which was nearest, taking the other places in their order, till he reached Michele's stand. Here he lingered a little to explain the nature of picnics and of this one in particular. While he was there the town-clock struck ten. Robert thought of his engagement and started toward the field. He had not gone far when he

remembered his mother's letter, and he was half a mile from the post-office.

"Mike," he called, running back, "will you please mail this letter at the post-office? It is very important. I think it has a check in it."

Michele took it and looked at it wonderingly. He sat down on the curb after Robert was gone, and turned it over and over. He had not seen many letters, and certainly none like this. It was small and square, and very white,—he thought letters were always oblong and yellow. Then there was a black border around the edge on one side, while on the other, four black lines converged at the centre where there was a curious little picture of a hand carrying a torch. Of course there was the stamp in the corner on the right side. It would have taken a greater expert than Michele to decipher the angular black scratches across the face of the letter. He took for granted that they meant something, though they were ever so much like the marks on a tea-chest. He unconsciously respected the person who could make such scratches. He felt the letter carefully, wondering what a "check" might be. Presently a policeman sauntered toward him. Hastily thrusting the letter into his pocket, Michele got up and began playing. He had been grinding away mechanically for some time, thinking about the picnic, when a loose horse came running down the street, overturned his organ

and stopped the music. Nobody was hurt, but Michele's invention was sorely taxed in setting the broken leg of his machine, and the letter was forgotten. After a while he began to think about the picnic again, longing to go, yet half afraid of a trap to catch him. He tramped away over to the base-ball field, hoping to see Robert there and perhaps to find out something more about it.

There was no chance for that, however, and it was very tiresome to stand in the hot sun watching a game which he did not understand. He was tired and hungry when he reached home that night, and after a scanty supper he curled up in a corner and forgot his troubles.

To the old woman with whom he lived, Michele had accounted for the accident to his organ, as well as for the gaping wound in his only trousers, which she patiently tried to heal while their owner slept. It was the most natural thing in the world, after mending the rent and sewing up a rip or two, to thrust her hand into the pockets, making sure that they were whole for the safe-keeping of small coin. It was also but natural that the letter which she found there should arouse the liveliest curiosity. At first she regarded it with awe. Then she began to finger it suspiciously, holding it up to the light. Unable to read a word of the superscription, — or of anything else, in fact, — she grew vaguely jealous of

the writer. What motive could have inspired it, and with whom was Michele in communication unknown to her, his only friend? She tried to find a peep-hole to discover the evil thing which it must contain. It was in mourning, too. Bad luck, again. Long and anxiously she pondered over the white mystery, which was fast losing its pristine whiteness, greedily devouring it with her eyes, until the flickering lamp warned her to restore it to its place. With a sigh, she grudgingly put out the light and resigned herself to her unwholesome bed, but not to sleep. The train of apprehensions which had been set in motion shot up and down her excited brain, until she dreaded lest Michele might be spirited away or murdered before her very eyes. At last, able to bear it no longer, she got up and crawled painfully through the darkness to Michele's side, took the letter from his pocket, and hid it with trembling hands in her own bosom, satisfied that in doing so, she had cunningly cheated fate of its prey. If Michele ever asked her for it, — she told herself, — she would not acknowledge that it was in her possession, until she had drawn from him a full confession of his secret; all the while flattering herself that she was acting a mother's part toward the motherless lad.



CHAPTER IV.

WHAT MIGHT HAVE BEEN EXPECTED.



NOTWITHSTANDING her objection to the quality of the guests, Hannah's skill was put to the test in preparing luncheon for the picnic. She baked and boiled and fried and bottled till there seemed to be provision for a regiment of hungry soldiers. And she packed it with as much care as if to supply a dainty invalid. The baskets and hampers might have been transported across the ocean without harm or danger of loss, so securely were they labelled and corded.

Saturday dawned fair and warm, which was a sign to those invited that the picnic would come off without fail. Such a queer little company as it was, when they were all gathered at the station ! Mrs. Beal wondered if she were not to have "no place to set down on, the hull mortal day," and Ellen hoped her "'seven' wouldn't eat themselves to death." Mrs. Trumbull assured them

that their comfort would be her chief business, and to prove it, applied herself to the task of rescuing one of the Twins from imminent danger of strangulation in the attempt to swallow the best part of an unaccustomed apple, while the other shrieked herself into a more critical state than her sister. In the midst of the din, the enlivening strain of a hand-organ burst forth. Spero was wild with delight, barking and frisking as if he were not fast approaching the end of his allotted career, and, strange to tell, Piccolo did not openly resent such levity. If Hannah was not "overly" enthusiastic, perhaps it was because she feared to compromise her dignity by attending to the wants of a lower stratum of society.

"I never!" she exclaimed aside to Ruth. "I s'pose its awful fash'nuble to make sech a fuss over poor folks, but 'tain't my way. In my 'umble 'pinion 'tain't 'preciated."

It would be hard to say whether the children enjoyed the picnic more than the journey, for even a ride of ten miles was full of interest to them. At first the train ran between dank, discouraged fences that stood knee-deep in green ooze-water, in a most unwholesome way. But it was not long before they entered a cool, dark wood and came out on the other side into an open country through farms, and meadows, and orchards. It needed only a hint from Ruth to pretend that the long, straight rows of apple-trees

past which they flew were lines of soldiers wheeling and retiring and advancing in true military fashion; and by a trick of the imagination the puffing engine, keeping time to the tune of "Yankee Doodle," could easily be made to counterfeit the "band," so completing the illusion. All along the road the boys saluted every child on every fence, and the bystanders at every station.

They got off at a flag station, and entering a dusty road, pursued it a short way, then struck into a foot-path through a pleasant, shady lane till it came to some bars which they let down, and passing through, put up again.

"Is this the picnic?" asked Jacky, as with shining eyes he beheld the glories of a dandelion-bespangled meadow. But we are always to be blessed, and some one took pains to assure him that this was only the way to the picnic, and not the real thing. So the little fellow restrained his happiness, waiting for more. They went through the field and across a bridge where two silly brooklets met and went on gossiping together. The boys stayed a long while watching the timid minnows darting hither and thither. They envied a bare-foot country lad who sat on the bank catching sun-fish. They watched him awhile with wistful eyes, as he landed the shining beauties; but fishing at second-hand is such hungry work that they soon pushed on again, to reach a pleasant country-house whose

grounds Mrs. Trumbull had engaged for that day. How beautiful it all was, — and how still ! But before they stopped to admire grass or flowers or blossoming shrub ; without listening to the song of bird or drone of bee ; before setting up a wicket or climbing a tree ; scarcely pausing for a roll in the grass, with one accord the eager company gathered around the hampers which carried their luncheon. And how they did eat ! And drink ! Lemonade ran in refreshing streams down their little throats, and ginger-pop flowed after that. What fun they had hunting for four-leaf-clovers in generous clumps where they oftener turned out five ! Ruth taught the girls to make oak-leaf garlands to trim their hats. She decorated the Twins with funny dandelion curls. She showed the boys how to blow bugle-blasts upon a leaf between her thumbs, although undoubtedly some of them would rather have pursued their game of “getting arrested,” which she had interrupted.

Until to-day Jacky had supposed that cherries grew, ready for eating, in little boxes at the fruit stalls. When Mrs. Trumbull gave the party leave to climb a cherry-laden tree to pick for themselves its fruit, which she had bought, that illusion was dispelled.

Poor Jacky could n't climb ; but the others pelted him with more cherries than he could eat, so he was satisfied.

Of all that happy party, Robert was happiest. He teased Martin, he mimicked Michele, whom he always called "Mike." He hid Ellen's reticule with all her medicines for the "seven," challenged Mrs. Beal to run a race for a bottle of ginger-pop, made Jacky sing whenever Michele turned the crank of his organ, and he himself was always ready to applaud, no matter what was done.

There is a saying that "one cannot pour happiness on others without getting a few drops on himself," and despite their misgivings, Mrs. Trumbull and Hannah enjoyed the picnic almost as much as those for whom it was given.

As they were leaving the grounds, the party passed an alluring bed of day-lilies. Stopping to admire them, the children lingered long to drink in the perfume of the milky blossoms.

"It's a shame to spoil this place with these hateful signs," Robert complained, pointing to a notice to respect the flowers, posted in the midst of the lilies.

"Oh, that is necessary," answered his mother. "So many people come here that there would soon be no flowers left for any one to enjoy, if that warning were taken away."

"Well, I don't like it. It makes you feel as if they thought you'd be dishonest," he persisted.

"Would it be dishonest to take just one?"

Jacky asked, wistfully eying a beautiful pink-tipped bud within his reach.

"Why, of course it would be just as bad as if you took a dozen full-blown lilies. They are not ours, you know, and to take what does not belong to us is wrong," answered Ruth.

"All the same, I would not put up such signs in my garden. Why, if they were to give you a lily, you could not carry it out of the grounds without seeming dishonest."

At that instant Ruth's glance rested upon Michele, just in time to see him reach out his hand toward the lilies as he leaned over them, and quickly withdraw it. Her heart gave a bound of joy. He had resisted the temptation. She might have fancied it, but she thought his eyes sought hers, and she smiled benignly upon him in return. When they were seated in the train, coming home, the odor of the lily-bed was so strong that some one spoke of it; and for the first time Ruth knew that, buttoned under Michele's soiled and ragged jacket, a sweet, pure lily was crumpled and stained. The discovery laid a new burden upon her. To win his confidence without betraying her own knowledge of the theft was no easy matter. She took a seat near him.

"Did n't you wish to bring away one of those pretty lilies?" she asked, looking into his beautiful eyes.

"Oh, no," he replied, returning her regard without the quiver of a muscle.

"It would have been wrong to take one without asking," she went on, "but if you had wished it very much, I would have begged one from the gardener."

"Oh, me, I-a don' care," he answered indifferently. And still the tell-tale lily filled the car with its fragrance.

When Hannah heard the story, with characteristic perverseness she said — not "I told you so," — simply : —

"Poor boy, to have to steal a posy an' then lie about it! I never! He ain't ter blame fer lovin' on 'em. He didn't have no ma ter spank him when he was a baby. 'Course he'd lie if he'd steal. They go together 's nat'ral as meat an' pertater.

' And he that does one fault at first,
And lies to hide it, makes it two,'

's the poet says. It's the way sech vagabones is brung up. Give 'em a ninch an' they'll take a nell." Yet she spent many a long hour that night, "'raslin' in prayer" for light on this very subject.

The misfits in Hannah's character were oddly reproduced in her personality. Tall and rather masterful of figure, an amplitude of proportion gave her a motherly air. Her blue eyes, so mild

and true, were a perpetual apology for the fixed restraint of a large mouth. The stress of fifty summers had left no trace upon her pale-brown hair. Hannah had known no winters. Her small nose seemed lost in the broad expanse of her wrinkled face ; for Hannah had more wrinkles than could be accounted for in the natural way, — mellow wrinkles, like the lines in a quilted fabric. She was severely neat in her dress, with an odd effect of having abjured some coveted article of ornament. Whether the two little horizontal red lines on either side of her nose were due to a surreptitious use of spectacles, who can tell? One thing we do know. Hannah's theory was stern, her practice gentle. Her speech was plain, her thought considerate. As just as Horatio, she was as merciful as Portia. Hannah was not easy to be entreated, but in her heart was many a secret cosey corner for the unfortunate to nestle in. Fate had cheated her of home and children, but her seamy old heart was as sweet as a nut. At Mrs. Trumbull's marriage Hannah had been transferred from the old home to the new ; so, naturally, she came to regard herself as a sort of missionary with the duty — privilege were nearer the mark — of guardian, mentor, friend, and in a grim fashion, comforter. In this case, she had foreseen the difficulty which beset Mrs. Trumbull, and had tried to grapple with it in her own homely way at the start by frowning upon the

"fightin' I-talyun " and all his works. She had watched the growing anxiety of her mistress, and the growing interest of her little master, for, — though she would not for a moment have admitted such a relation, — Hannah was Robert's slave. Now, she knew that a crucial test of her faith was coming, and she was bracing herself to stand by when she was needed. If Mrs. Trumbull persisted in going to destruction without asking her advice, she would make bold to give it, "whether or no."

"I never!" she soliloquized as she briskly plied her needle, "I never 'n all my born days seen such a miskackerlater 's Mis' Trumbull. She flies in the face of Prov'dunce 'n then 'xpects the Lord to keep her from gittin' scratched. 'T's all 'long o' new-fangled notions 'bout bein' free 'n equal. I never! Ain't a 'grain o' prudence wuth a pound o' craft,' I 'd like ter know? Only think o' that black-hearted furriner breathin' the same air an' eatin' the same vittals as Robert Trumbull's kin. I declare, I never! I b'leeve to conscience that poor man will rise out o' the ground in his graveclo'se, an' pertest, if she ain't got a grain more sense n' not to *see* what a born idyot she is b'fore it 's too late."

In her hymn-book Hannah possessed a perennial resource. When all other devices failed, with characteristic energy she tuned her voice to sacred lays, which were pretty sure to hit the mark

and rarely failed to edify her hearers. In the present instance she contented herself with humming sundry snatches of a denunciatory psalm, which long years of association had connected inseparably with the proper words.

"Guess ye've got 'nough of that there theevin' I-talyun, hain't ye, Robby?" They were talking about the picnic, that evening.

"I don't know what you mean, Hannah."

"You don't? I never! Well, when ye smell a lily's strong 's a drug-store, an' can't 'count for 't no way, 'nless ye've got it yerself, I should n't say 't was no gre't conundrum who had got it."

"Do you mean that Mike stole a lily to-day?"

"That 's 'bout the 'mount on 't."

"I do not believe it!" he cried, stamping his foot.

"Go 'long an' ask yer ma. She did n't want to make ye mad, prob'bly, or she 'd 'a told you herself."

Off flew Robert, irate and impetuous.

"I do not believe Mike stole a lily to-day, do you, mother? Hannah says he did."

"Yes, dear, I am sorry that Hannah is right. Don't you remember the sweet smell in the car? Ruth spoke to Michele about it, and he told her an untruth, for he had a lily hidden under his coat all the while."

"Well, how did he know it was wrong? He

never had anybody to tell him," apologized his friend.

"No, and I am afraid he has lived so long in bad habits, he will continue to lie and steal."

"Why can't Miss Ruthy teach him — and you, mother dear? he would listen to you." Robert's arm stole around his mother's neck and he kissed her persuasively, stroking her soft hair.

"Ruth is doing her best, Robert," she said evasively, "but do you think he is just the sort of boy whom you should choose to — to know very well? I wish you would be satisfied to leave him to Ruth."

"I like him," persisted Robert, "and I don't think it's fair to neglect him."

"He will be cared for, I promise you."

"But I must do something."

"No, Robert, I would rather you should not."

"O, please — please don't forbid me. Will you, mother dear?"

"No, but I trust you to do what you think is right, after all we have said. And, Robby, don't you think you are rather impatient with Hannah when she disagrees with you? Her fault-finding is for very love of you."

"Then she must be awfully fond of me, for she nags me all the while."

"O, Robert!"

"Well, I did n't mean to be hard on her, but she is n't fair, and it makes me mad. She always

believes things she hears, without knowing. But I s'pose she 's like Mike ; she can't help it because she does n't know any better. Mother, don't you think he 'd like to do right after he got used to it? I'm going to think of something to do for him. Can't I, mother, please?"

He kissed her again and ran back to Hannah.

"Will you please excuse me for being cross?" he asked penitently.

"Ye wa'n't 's cross 's ye was contradictin'," she conceded. "'Tain't putty manners t' git mad an' stomp yer foot."

"Well, I'm going to try to keep my temper with you, no matter how you provoke me," he declared ; "and, Hannah, won't you try to think of some way to break Mike of— of such wrong things as he does? Mother is going to."

Hannah promised grimly, and the boy went off comforted.

"Shet him up where he won't spile other boys," she soliloquized. "I guess that 'd break him of doin' wrong if anything will."





CHAPTER V.

PROSPECTING.



ONE afternoon, not long after, Ruth and Hannah set out to discover the place which Michele called home. Willing to oblige Ruth, yet not in the least sympathizing with her "new-fangled" notions, Hannah regarded the expedition coldly, and consented only when Ruth threatened to go without company.

Through narrow streets and filthy alleys, known to them until now only by name, they picked their way, all unconscious of the sensation which their appearance was creating. It was not often that the neighborhood was invaded by outsiders, unless, indeed, by the police.

"Guess it must be 'long here somewheres," said Hannah, stopping for breath at a muddy crossing. Hannah was not used to walking. "Ain't this 'ere Arrer Street?"

"Oh, yes, this is Arrow Street, but it is too swell altogether for our friends to live in. We are looking for Arrow Place, you know. Harold says it comes into Merchant, at the bend," returned Ruth, pushing on.

It cost Hannah a strong effort of the will to follow her advance-guard down an alley narrower and dingier still.

"Come on!" called Ruth, beckoning. "This is the number."

"Of all things! I do b'lieve to conscience, 't is the very place. Looks like a toothpick, don't it? — so tall an' so narrer," said Hannah, joining her companion. Ruth glanced up at the high tenement.

"This is pretty slummy, is n't it? It does not seem possible that Michele lives in such a dreadful neighborhood," she sighed.

"Yissum, I sh'd think 's like 's not he would," assented Hannah, sniffing.

"Well, he is an aristocrat at any rate, for he lives at the top, and that is something," Ruth returned.

It was a tedious climb up three flights of dark and narrow stairs, separated by unventilated, unlighted hallways. The struggle between the noisome stench and the disinfectants intended to overcome it, became more intolerable with each succeeding story.

They knocked at a door nearest the top land-

ing, only to learn that not one of the children who swarmed about them had ever heard of Michele.

"Well, I'm thankful he don't reside with no sech shif'less, sozzlin' critters as them be," Hannah congratulated herself as they turned away.

"Do not boast till we have taken off our harness," returned Ruth. "We have n't seen the right place yet."

They retraced their steps with wonderful alacrity to encounter a mob of ragged urchins awaiting them at the entrance with undisguised curiosity.

"Can you tell me where Michele Caputo lives?" asked Ruth, addressing the crowd impersonally.

"Naw," — in chorus.

"He is an organ-grinder," she explained, raising her voice. A whispered consultation in the ranks resulted in counter-questioning.

"'S his name Moike?"

"Yes."

"Wot yer want uv 'im?"

Ruth found it difficult to explain her business to so large an audience, and her embarrassment was naturally ascribed to unfriendly motives.

"Yer goin' ter git 'im pulled?" some one suggested.

"Got a cop' in dere?" asked another.

"Now see here, jest clear out — the hull o' ye! I never! 'F I kin find a p'licem'n 'round here

anywheres, you 'll ketch it," blustered Hannah. "The idea 'f a pa'cel o' boys henderin' an' hootin' at peaceable folks in this style!"

Ruth was ready to fly ingloriously, when the opportune appearance of an officer put the rabble to flight like a covey of partridges. He was able to supply the information they wanted, and the two women were personally conducted to the rear of number 27, which looked even less promising than the building which they had first entered. Built of wood and guiltless of paint, it was surrounded by galleries at every story, all of which were swarming with cats, dogs, and children, of every hue and age. Lines of wet clothing flapped against them as they pursued their quest. Boxes of garbage and barrels of coal stood in the passages. The whole structure leaned perceptibly under its burden of poverty. Access could be gained only by a series of sagging outside staircases, which, after all, proved a blessing in disguise, since they had the advantage of a circulation of air, — such as it was.

They had no further trouble in finding the place, for the "Widdy Finerty" enjoyed a wide acquaintance. Their knock was answered by a cheery voice.

"Come in, plaze," it said.

"Does Michele Caputo live here?" panted Ruth.

"Indade an' he duz, mum, whin he 's widhin,"

replied a little old woman, pausing a moment in her occupation of stirring a steaming pot of stew, to take a quick survey of her visitors. A pair of crutches lay beside her, accounting for the fact of her sitting so close to an apology for a stove.

"You ain't his mother?" Hannah exclaimed.

"Ye 're right, mum," assented the hostess. A quizzical smile set in motion all the wrinkles of her withered face, as she added:—

"Me name is Finerty, mum, savin' yer presence."

"Have you known Michele very long?" ventured Ruth.

"Well, mum, we arren't prechoisely shtrangers, as ye moight say."

"I am glad he has such a good friend," Ruth replied.

"It's a poor rule that don't work both ways," said Hannah, sententiously, tucking up her skirt as she appropriated to herself a seat on a box near the door.

"Dan, Danny, me b'y, rin en' fetch chairs for the foine ladies, axin' yer pardon, mum."

From a dusky recess of the ill-lighted den, issued a bow-legged, shock-headed, freckled, little blue-eyed brownie, pushing a chair before him over the warped and greasy floor with incredible speed.

Ruth was glad to accept a seat, even so grudgingly offered; for she perceived Mrs. Finerty's

covert rebuke to Hannah for seating herself uninvited.

"Dere ain't no more nor one chair, Granny," Danny frankly explained.

"Whisht, me manny, whisht! ye mane the chairs is all occypied at the prisint toime," amended the woman, and again a whimsical smile scudded across her face. The boy eyed Ruth curiously. She held out her hand to him.

"Thank you, dear," she said. "So you live here too."

"Mebby it's afther takin' the cinsus ye air, ladies," Granny remarked tentatively.

"No mom, we ain't here on no sech bizniz 't all," said Hannah, and Ruth hastened to add:

"Oh, no indeed! Michele is in my class in Sunday-school, so we came to — see — to pay you a visit."

"So ye 're the young lady! 'Thank ye koindly mum. Oi 'm honored meself wid seein' the loikes o' ye. Sure, Moike 'll be disappointed ut himself 's not widhin, the day."

While she seemed to answer civilly, both visitors were made to feel like intruders. The old woman had divided her time between them and the savory-smelling pot, which she now attempted to remove from the fire. Hannah sprang up and lifted it off, replacing the stove-cover. Then reseating herself she returned to the charge.

"Mrs. Finerty, be you any kin o' this 'ere I-talyun?" she asked.

"Oi am not, mum."

"Wall, he don't favor ye much, I mus' confess," she continued.

"He seems to be a very—very good-natured boy," observed Ruth, feeling her ground.

"Indade he is that, mum."

"Does he airn 'nough to pay for his keep?" Hannah inquired.

"Oh, that varies according to circumstances, does it not, Mrs. Finerty?" Ruth interposed.

"The b'y is welcome to the bit an' sup, whether or no," replied the old woman, cordially.

"Now, I call that real decent," acknowledged Hannah. "But after all 's said an' done, sech a big hearty-eatin' feller 's him, orter airn stiddy, 'sted o' hangin' round pickin' up a cent or two, now an' agin."

Mrs. Finerty silently stirred the stew.

"I wonder if Michele goes to night school," ventured Ruth, feeling like a detective.

"Oi belave not, mum," — coldly.

"Does this little boy go to kindergarten?" she asked, turning to Danny.

"He does not, mum, thank God!" The grandmother bestowed a fond look upon him.

"Danny, would n't you like to go to school with other little boys and girls?" asked Ruth.

"It 's free — yer don't hev ter pay," explained Hannah. Danny was listening attentively.

"There is a free kindergarten not far from here," Ruth pursued, "where Danny might go if Michele would take him to school in the morning and call for him when it is over."

The grandmother looked anxious, stroking the child's red, round head.

"Danny is that intilligint in his head, mum, Oi 'm afther thinkin' there 'ud be danger uv his brains, mebby," she objected.

"Humph! I guess not!" Hannah protested. "I never! Why, I've knowed plenty chaps littler 'n him, 't could read 'n spell reel lessöns, an' it did n't hurt 'em none, neither."

It was well for her that Mrs. Finerty's Irish tongue clove to the roof of her mouth, for what grandmother could brook impartial comparison to the disadvantage of her darling? Ruth hastened to apply an emollient.

"At the kindergarten-school," she explained, "children are not expected to read. They only sing pretty songs and learn to make things of blocks and of bright-colored wools."

"Granny, Granny, plaze lave me go! Oh, plaze, plaze!" the boy pleaded vociferously.

"Go 'long wid ye, ye plague uv the warrld;" laughed Granny.

"Sure, what 'u'd the loikes o' ye be afther doin' wid purrty wools, an' thim fingers that dhurrt?" she added, after a pause.

"Ye'd better not look a gift horse in the mouth, 'f ye want my advice," said Hannah.

Ruth felt this a favorable time to take her leave. As she rose she slipped a coin into Danny's little hand, which, to tell the truth, was not clean. Indeed, neither the room itself nor anything in it gave evidence of even a casual acquaintance with soap and water.

"Granny, plaze moight Oi buy a flower?" the boy loudly besought, following them to the door, and opening his palm to show her the money.

"Does the little man love flowers?" Ruth asked.

"Oh, that he duz, mum. He 'll sit an' shmell, an' shmell an auld withery posy that Moike 'll be afther st'alín' from an ash-hape, wid the proide uv a prisidunt."

"Is Mike often so lucky 's all that comes to?" Hannah inquired.

"Indade he is not, mum. Howiver, he wunst found the beautifulest white wan that shmelled loike paradise, an' Danny, he 'll always be afther expectin' the loikes, since. Moike niver forgets the baby, nor will he, the saints be praised!"

Hannah and Ruth exchanged glances.

"Sh'd think 't would n't be no gre't trouble to keep plants o' yer own in that there winder 'f 't was washed," volunteered Hannah.

"Sure, mum, Oi moight thravel to the Auld Counthry if so be beggars could ride." Mrs. Finerty ignored the slur upon her housekeeping.

"I will send Danny a pretty plant if he will be sure to give it water to drink every day. Will you, dear?"

"Indade but Oi will, thin, ivery day — thank God!" Danny promised eagerly.

Lacking plausible excuse for staying longer, the visitors took their leave, realizing that while they were at last on friendly terms with Mrs. Finerty, they knew no more about Michele than when they came.

"We must try it again," Ruth said as they descended the stairs.

"'Spose there ain't no other way for 't," answered Hannah, "but that ole woman does rub my fur the wrong way, dretful."





CHAPTER VI.

CONFIDENCES.

DURING the short period between the picnic and the usual summer migration of the Trumbull family, Robert was too much absorbed to seek Michele very often. From morning till night, indoor and out, were heard eager, high-pitched voices, talking, laughing, shouting, — sometimes wrangling. With the partisanship of boyhood, Robert and his friends discussed, almost fought over, the merits of every possible appliance for out-door sports, from tennis-rackets and "league-balls," through the family of bicycles. To Captain Tom Warren alone would they defer when dispute ran high, and from his decision there was no appeal. Tom was a big boy, and that, or his indifference to hero worship, rendered him absolutely irresistible to the little fellows who looked up to him. So Hannah's hymn-book lay open at

“songs of deliverance,” while Mrs. Trumbull congratulated herself that masterly inactivity on her own part had been the course of wisdom.

In the mean time Michele went to Sunday-school, or stayed away, at pleasure, — usually he stayed away ; for aside from the singing and the chance of seeing Robert, he cared nothing at all for it. Ruth’s disappointment over this was embittered by an uneasy sense of her own dereliction of duty. Was this the way she was doing her part in the world’s work that she had so long coveted? she asked herself. Heartily wishing to win Michele’s confidence, she would have taken no end of trouble for him had the way been made clear to her.

One day she met him, — organ on shoulder and dog at heel, — in the sweltering heat of noon. She tried to engage him in conversation, talking about the weather, about the picnic, and about Piccolo, — for Piccolo was a dog to inspire conversation ; but the boy evidently avoided her. After they parted she found it hard to think of anything else. His utter forlornness touched her, — all the more, perhaps, that he seemed to be unconscious of it.

Meanwhile the summer passed, and with the first frost of autumn Mrs. Trumbull and Robert returned. After all her solicitude for Robert, it was not long before he himself cut the knot which had defied her skill to untangle. One blustering

evening, when home seemed all the cosier for the contrast, Hannah was heard in a spirited altercation at the street door.

"Mis' Trumbull, won't you come here?" she concluded, looking into the library. "I wish you'd send this 'ere boy 'bout his biz'niz. He says Robert 'nvited him, but I don't b'leeve one word on't."

"I did ask him, too," Robert interrupted, flaring up. "Come right in, Mike; Hannah won't hurt you. Mother's here and she'll be glad to see you," — pushing by Hannah as he spoke to the visitor.

Grumbling and defeated, Hannah deserted the field, forgetting to shut the door. As Mrs. Trumbull turned to close it, a blast of bitter cold air that reached her seemed to whisper: —

"If that were your boy, — friendless, and a stranger in a strange land, — would you not wish some other boy's mother to take him in on such a night as this, to warm and comfort him?"

When she returned to the library the two boys were standing before the fire. The Italian was the taller and the elder, experience making him seem much older than Robert. With a frank smile Robert made room for his mother as he said: —

"Are n't you glad Mike came to-night, mother? It is so nice and warm here, and the wind sounds so lonesome out-doors! He could n't have

found a better time to come, could he? I have been expecting him every night for a week, but I was afraid he would disappoint me, so I did not say anything about it." Robert refrained from adding the thought that was in all their minds: "and Mike has no home." Neither did Mrs. Trumbull put into words her sudden suspicion that her son had often sought this stranger without her knowledge. In the present strait she tried to do her duty by giving the lad a welcome. Seating herself near the cheery blaze, with her work, she asked, —

"Is it so very cold?"

"Bed-a you li-ive," was the explicit reply.

Robert's quick eye sought his mother's in a glance which seemed to say, "Is n't he funny?" while he took Michele's answer as a matter of course. Anxious though she was, she tried to put the organ-grinder at his ease, for his own sake; moreover, if she failed of hospitality to this poor stranger, Robert would have just cause for grievance. So they amused Michele much as they would entertain any other boy, with pictures and music and stories. And he accepted all their overtures with shy indifference, punctuated by an occasional remark in the *argot* of the streets. Once or twice as he turned over a collection of foreign photographs he was really surprised into something like enthusiasm.

"I see you are fond of pictures, Michele," re-

marked Mrs. Trumbull. "There are a great many fine ones in Italy."

"So?"

"Yes, indeed. Do you remember Italy at all?"

Michele shook his head doubtfully.

"How did you happen to come to this country?"

"De Amer'ca?"

"Yes, what made you come to America?" — talking very loudly.

"Oh, me-a I cand-a know."

"Have you friends in Springville?"

"Don'-a know whad-a ees." The boy seemed puzzled.

"I mean, — are your parents here?"

"Parren?"

"Yes, dear boy, do your father and mother live here?" She was shrieking at him in her frantic efforts to make him understand.

"No," he answered sadly, with a far-away look in his beautiful eyes.

"Where are they?" she pursued.

"My-a muzzer, — don' know. My fazzer ees-a pud een-a wadder. He ees-a die ad ship."

"Poor boy!" The words escaped her rather than were spoken voluntarily, but they went straight to Michele's heart. A grateful radiance overspread his dark face. Robert's was clouded with distress.

"Who takes care of you then?"

"Me, I 'm-a all-a-way take care fo' Danny."

"Who is Danny?"

"I-a no know 'f ees-a — Danny ees-a wan boy."

"Where do you live?"

"Lif'-a weed-a Granny."

"Miss Ruthy knows where it is, mother," Robert interposed anxiously. "We might all go to see him sometime."

So the conversation was happily diverted from what threatened to become painfully personal, and Robert was comforted; but his mother sighed as she thought of the lily.

Across her knitting, Mrs. Trumbull anxiously studied the boys, bending together over the pages of a book. What different stories those two little heads revealed! Robert's, round and shapely, his fair, soft hair glossy with the shine which suggests the stroke of a loving hand. Black and bristling, Michele's hair grew thick upon a smaller, oval head. His wide-apart, handsome black eyes, with their long lashes, just suggested his ability to conceal that which Robert's wide-open eyes could not but betray.

When nuts and apples were brought in, Michele's tongue was unloosed. He could talk with his mouth full, as if the exercise of his jaws diverted attention from his lame English and uncouth manners. If Hannah had been allowed

her own way, however, Michele's fount of inspiration would not have been discovered.

"I never!" she growled; "I never 'n all my life! What next, I want ter know? She'd orter be took to a lunatic 'sylum, 'fore she's a day older. My sakes alive! I can't say I hope them nuts 'll choke him, — leastways not to death, — but it 'ud be a marcy if suthin' hap-pened to stay her in her downward course b'fore it's too late."

In great stress of mind, Hannah derived much comfort — profit, she esteemed it — in talking to herself. This she considered a peculiarly appropriate occasion, and she improved it, *sotto voce*, to her entire satisfaction. But nothing could dampen the pleasure of the two happily unconscious boys. Spero, even, persisted in sitting on his hind legs in dumb admiration of Robert's guest. And what wonder that Mrs. Trumbull was touched by the wistful look with which the Italian sometimes regarded her? Yet who could blame her if, however unconsciously, she was promising herself that this first visit should also be the last? No good could come of the acquaintance, at least to Robert. Then, in spite of herself, she fell to thinking about the other boy, — whether he was lonely; what were his amusements, if indeed he had any; whether he slept warm at night, — this, at least, she would attend to; whether he made enough money to keep him from hunger.

“Mother, Michele is going to bring Piccolo the next time he comes. I wonder if Spero will fight him.”

How merrily the boys laughed at the remembrance of the quarrel with which their acquaintance had begun. Mrs. Trumbull sighed to think that in Robert's mind a “next time” was even possible, resolving to frustrate that possibility with the least attainable friction. And when the front door closed behind Michele, Hannah trumpeted her favorite hymn with peculiar unction: —

“Strait is the way my saints have trod,
I blessed the path and made it plain;
But you would choose the crooked road,
And down it leads to endless pain.”

She sang it faithfully, if unskilfully, from beginning to end. Poor Hannah, if she had only known! There was no uncertain sound to her message, and even if she had not set the kitchen door “on the jar,” she might have been plainly heard.

After Robert had gone to bed, she returned from the kitchen to set the house in order for the night. She fussed and pottered about, with the evident desire of attracting Mrs. Trumbull's attention. But so absorbing did her book appear that Hannah was forced to speak.

“Mis' Trumbull, I can't stan' it no longer,”

she began bravely. "Sure 's I live an' breathe, I b'leeve you'r kinder losin' yer grip." Mrs. Trumbull put her open book on her knee, face downward, to indicate that this interruption was not only unexpected but temporary. If Hannah proceeded with something less of confidence, she lacked nothing of emphasis. "I don't want ter find no fault with ye, I'm sure," she insisted; "but them ain't the sort o' folks that Robert Trumbull's kin is used ter goin' with."

"Hannah!"

"Yissum, you may 'Hannah' me 's long 's ye please. It's the gospel truth, an' I'm goin' ter clear my conscience by tellin' on't. I know where the trouble is. I guess I ain't blind. It's all 'long o' clubs an' sech. Folks go 'round now-a-days a-palaverin' over gypsies an' vagabones, 'cos it's the style, 'thout cakalatin' the cost. I never!" Hannah's zeal had carried her further than she intended. Her heart was swelling with foreboding for the boy whom she loved so tenderly, and her young mistress felt that she could well afford to overlook the freedom of a faithful friend and trusty ally.

"Hannah, why do you judge me so severely?" Mrs. Trumbull complained. "You are the last person to turn away a boy like that. He has no home, no mother, and no money; and besides, Robert asked him to come," — trying to bolster up her own courage.

"But what about our boy? Will it do him any good to hev wicked companions, I'd like ter know? Do you want ter make a lyin' little thief o' Robby? I never!" The old woman winked away her tears, polishing the back of a chair with her hard red hand.

"Robert must not make a friend of Michele. He will not disobey me."

"It's all right ter shet the barn door when the hoss is stole," returned Hannah, hotly. "That there I-talyun is a friend o' Robert's this minute, an' it can't be helped no way. I jest d'spise his slimpsey, meachin' looks." Covering her face with her apron, Hannah broke down and sobbed.

"Oh, Hannah, do not cry! Do you think I have chosen him for Robert's friend? Do you not see that if Michele is forbidden the house, Robert's sense of justice will be outraged, even though the boy is not a fit associate because of his poverty and ignorance? We must think this out together, and—why, Hannah, you always take your tangles to God! He will show us where the clew is."

"Yissum, I hev spread it all out before Him, an' He don't give me no light. I kinder thought He was waitin' to see 'f I was 'fraid ter do my duty, an' come ter you about it; so I jest up an' done my part, ter keep from henderin' on Him."

The woman's devotion moved Mrs. Trumbull

to confess that nothing was more out of harmony with her own wishes than that Robert should know Michele, but the acquaintance once made, to break it without violence to his feelings was a delicate matter. Hannah was quick to appreciate the difficulty of the situation, but failed to understand the "finicky notions" which restrained Mrs. Trumbull's hand from ruthlessly severing a friendship that could certainly come to no good. However, now that the ice was broken, and relations of confidence were restored, both women were the happier — as what woman is not foolish enough to be, if she can share her burden with another ?





CHAPTER VII.

LOCATING A CLAIM.



MICHELE was not yet a theme for perfectly frank discussion between Mrs. Trumbull and Ruth ; although, had the subject of reforming him been freely broached, it is likely that they would have found themselves in harmony as to the end, if not the means. And it is probable that when they went to the first meeting of the Woman's Club, after Mrs. Trumbull's return, each hoped to find in the paper on " Individual Responsibility for the Poor " some practical solution of the problem which had been introduced into their lives. Indeed, the essayist treated the subject with considerable skill, telling many homely truths which provoked a spirited discussion.

" It seems to me," began the leader, — why will every woman begin : " It seems to me " ? — " that a burden of responsibility rests upon mothers

who coddle and spoil their own sons, while they neglect the waifs who swarm our streets to grow up in ignorance and to become criminals."

Mrs. Burr asked excitedly: "What about mothers who leave their own children to servants, or without any care at all, while they themselves are at orphans' homes or newsboys' missions? And what of mothers who spend their evenings hacking at municipal evils or at social reforms, while their sons make merry at the club?"

"Why lay the sin at woman's door at all?" Mrs. Grow inquired. "It is men who legislate; and to the laxity of our civil code as well as to the derelict officers of the law belongs the blame."

"Would not compulsory education, if it were enforced, answer the purpose?" asked a visitor.

"It would go a great way toward it, for ignorance is the father of sin," replied some one.

"So far as it goes," returned the first speaker, "compulsory education is useful, but even that would not furnish homes and mothers for tramps."

"May I ask whether it is proposed to take the children of the slums into our own homes to contaminate others?"

Mrs. Perkins, junior, appealed to the chair.

"That is a vital question," sighed a gentle, motherly old maid, without rising, — which was against the rules, and nobody replied, serving her right; for what should she know of the merits of the case, — she, only an old maid?

"Vagrants should be sent to reform schools, where crimes are punished and virtues inculcated," Madame Perkins, senior, insisted.

"Our reform schools and industrial schools together would not hold half our young vagrants," urged the leader. "Besides, we need boys as much as they need us. Fancy all our news-boys and boot-blacks and messengers — and these are rough, bad boys in the main — shut up within any walls, however friendly or beneficent. Institutions do not cover the ground, necessary though they be. No, Mrs. President, — and ladies ; believe me, we must give up the comfortable method of charity and reform by wholesale. I beg you not to undervalue the many ways by which we are trying to reach the masses with religious truth, — all honest effort from any quarter should be welcomed ; but we must not forget that prevention is far more useful than any remedy."

"So far, I am unable to see that any practical scheme for retail charity has been suggested," complained an eager little woman, searching for light.

"Nor am I able to offer any except one which, for its very simplicity, is likely to be despised. The Rev. Dr. Phelps used to say, 'The man who belongs nowhere belongs to me, and I must give account of him.' Could anything be simpler or kinder? I wish every member of this club would make a personal test of this plan, and

use the means nearest her own hand, to make friends with the poor — even with one poor boy or girl.”

The leader of the discussion sat down, only to be brought to her feet again by the question :

“Is money never to be regarded as a legal-tender of charity, instead of the personality which seems so desirable?”

“Undoubtedly, under certain circumstances, if it be not thrown at the poor, to hurt him, or wasted upon the encouragement of pauperism. Mere giving is but the husk of charity. Money administered at second-hand does but half its work. After a boy is rescued from the slums to become a good citizen, there will be no need to give him money. Help him to be self-respecting, and he will be self-supporting.”

“The question is just how to perform that miracle,” some sceptic objected.

“That depends largely upon the nature, environment, and docility of the ‘man who belongs nowhere,’ and upon the tact, faith, and patience of the person who holds himself bound to ‘give account of him.’”

“How simple and practical all this sounds!” remarked Mrs. Gale; “but the very idea of such a responsibility is maddening. Why, even the literal ‘cup of cold water’ is always wanted at the most inconvenient time.”

“That may be because we are such slaves to

conventionality that we fly in the face of Nature and bother to ice the water," retorted Mrs. Burr.

Much more was said, wise and otherwise, after the adjournment, — when the best things are often heard; such is the modesty of womankind. But Mrs. Trumbull did not stay to tea. She felt impatient of the whole subject, resenting the infringement on her liberty in the administration of charity. And Mrs. Trumbull was not niggardly with her money. She always subscribed to public institutions, she gave generously in private, — sometimes, indeed, when her sober judgment called her to account. Now, however, she denied the obligation to give herself with her alms. She refused to be held accountable for the boy who "belongs nowhere," — since to her the whole troublesome problem was incarnate in Michele.

And Ruth? Oh, Ruth lingered long over the tea-cups and the talk, in the eager quest for more light.

That night, Michele was unwittingly the pivot upon which the thoughts of both women revolved. One, challenging his right to disturb the peacefulness of her home, with sheer force closed the door of her heart upon him. The other thought it all out, willingly recognized the boy's claim upon her, and bravely accepted the responsibility of accounting for him. In any other matter each woman would naturally have sought counsel and comfort of the other, and, no doubt, in some way

Michele would have been provided for, irrespective of Robert.

If Ruth had harbored the idea of making a place for the lad in her own home, it was quickly abandoned, since both she and her brother Harold found shelter under the roof of an uncle, whose present responsibility was already out of proportion to his income.

Not long after, a second excursion to Arrow Place was undertaken at Hannah's instigation.

"Dunno but what we 're on a wild-goose chase, but I ain't a goin' ter 'give the devil his due if I can pervent it,' 's the sayin' is," she said.

"I think we are taking the best way to prevent it, too," encouraged Ruth.

"I declare ! Sometimes I think 't ain't no use tryin' to fix things in this world. 'T ain't no matter how I plan, I 'm allus 'bleeged to give up that the Lord knows what He 's 'bout, even 'f He don't manage to suit *me*. But it don't pervent me from wantin' to know how He 's goin' t' do it, an' tryin' t' help Him."

Chagrined over the futility of their former visit to Mrs. Finerty, Hannah determined to waste no time "parlez-vous-in', 's the Cap'n says," and Ruth was unprepared — after the usual exchange of civilities — to hear Hannah say : —

"Mis' Fin'ty, you're Irish fast 'nough ; an' Mike, he 's I-talyun, 's anybody kin see with half

an eye. Now, how under the canopy do you two come to be livin' together, 's peaceable 's the lion an' the lamb, 's what I wan' ter know."

"That's aisy tould, mum. Ye see we was both afther landin' in Ameriky the self-same toime, — me coomin' all the way from Oireland, and the b'y afther l'avin' Italy, where they tell me the sun is always shinin'. Well, mum, betune losin' me gurrl wid the faver on the ship, an' mesilf perishin' wid cauld an' homesickness, Oi was noigh out o' me head, praise God! The poor baby was afther wailin' noight an' day, an' nary a sowl to give me a lift wid 'im. While Oi duz be waitin' wid the rest uv thim at Castle Garden, falin' that sorry Oi would be glad to joomp intil the say, who should coom an' rale off one o' thim foine chunes, but Moike?

"Ye should see the baby! Joompin', an' crowin', wid legs an' arrums a-flyin' loike a little divil-fish, an' all the poor childer, forgettin' their impty stomachs, coom crowdin' round the b'y till he could shcarcely wag an arrum. But niver a Christian wurrd could he shpake, more 's the pity!

"Prisintly a foine gintilman wid an illegant uniform on, exshplained his jabber. He towld me the b'y's father doied uv the self-same faver that carried off the baby's poor mother — Hiven be praised! He was goin' his lone to airn his livin' wid the auld organ. Thin Oi shpake to the gintilman, very civil, an' Oi says, says Oi: —

“ ‘If so be the b’y ’ll be afther coomin’ along wid me an’ the baby, Oi ’ll divoide me crusht wid ’im intoirely.’

“The crathur was chatterin’ wid cauld, so Oi joosht pit me own gurr’s warm coat on till ’im — to save the throuble o’ carryin’ it, ye see.

“Thin we coom here, mum, an’ here we air, shtill, — thank God.”

“I don’t presume that dog o’ hizn was imported,” Hannah observed.

“Indade, an’ he was not, mum. The fursht noight we spint in this place — joosht whin we was afther dhroppin’ aff to our dhrames, there coom a shmellin’ an’ shniffin’ at the door. Oi belaved thaves was in ut, but Moike opened the door joosht a crack, — he was that bowld, — whin the poor shtarved dog limped in, waggin’ his tail nearly aff ’im. It was my intintions to put him out in the mornin’, but Moike begged that hard to kape the brute — though Oi could not sinse the langige he shpake — that Oi relinted. Besoides, mum, the crathur would not shtay pit out, but tased me loife out o’ me, wid shcratchin’ an’ howlin’. So Oi let ’im shtay, an’ it’s an intilligint baste that he is, intoirely.”

“I should think Michele must have given you a good deal of trouble, in one way or another,” Ruth remarked.

“Throuble indade have I seen wid ’im, mum. Oi does be frettin’ me loife out o’ me wid ’im

gittin' in bad company, an' the p'lice runnin' in an' out, widout sayin', 'Be yer lave.' "

"How did that happen?" asked Ruth, as Hannah uttered an unconscious, "I never!"

"Well, mum," returned the old woman, coldly; "Oi 'm that forgetful, Oi cannot raly say, mum; but — mebbey ye 'd bettther be axin' the p'lice fer yerself, if ye 're afther wantin' the pertic'lars."

Mrs. Finerty, observant of the manifest interest which her hint had excited in both women, be-thought herself in time to save Michele from incriminating evidence.

"I should like to know about it," Ruth declared boldly. "I suppose I could go to the police, but I would rather not. We are interested in helping the boy, and we could do it more intelligently if we knew what he was accused of."

"Accused of! Sure, it's not meself that's afther accusin' the b'y. The Lord forgive me!"

"Oh no; but you said he got into bad company and that the police troubled you."

"Thru' fur ye, Oi did, mum, but did Oi say the b'y had iver done wan thing to be arrested for, be the same token?"

"No, indeed," answered Ruth. "But was he long in — jail?" She hesitated to put it so baldly.

"That Oi cannot tell, mum."

"Has he been keeping bad company ever since?"

"Well, mum, if so be Oi could roon afther 'im noight an' day, Oi could' mebbby replot to yer questions the betther, mum."

Up to this time Hannah had been a silent listener. Now her patience gave way with an explosion.

"Look a here, Mis' Fin'ty, what on airth d' ye cack'late we're spendin' our precious time here for? I never! I'm a good notion to shake the dust off'n my feet, an' leave ye t' yer own destruction. Hain't ye got a teaspoonful o' sense? We ain't goin' to mince matters no longer. 'F that pesky I-talyun 's wuth the pains, I 'm willin' to do my share towards helpin' on him, an' ef you're goin' to set there an' cover up his actions I want to know it. Is he keepin' comp'ny with wicked folks, or not? You kin answer or hold yer tongue. It don't make a grain o' diffrunce t' us, but 't will ter you, I k'n tell ye."

Ruth did not interfere, and Hannah got up.

"The saints presarrve us!" exclaimed Mrs. Finerty, with modified manner. "Sure ye'd a roight to be the prisidunt's lady, ye talk that foine. I does be thinkin' there 's not the loikes o' ye in the Auld Counthry, lavin' alone the Quane herself, God bless her! If so be ye'd the toime t' shpar-re, Oi moight mebbby be afther givin' ye the inflammation ye wuz askin'."

"Of course, you are his best friend," said

Ruth ; "and we came to you thinking we might be able to help him through you."

"He 's moighty pertic'ler, is the b'y, about resavin' assistance from shtrangers."

"We are not strangers to him, and we did not mean to offer *him* anything — "

"Oh, well, mum, if it 's the burrglary ye 're thryin' to shmell out, me b'y niver done a hand's turn wid 'em afther he shtole into the windy — God forgive him ! "

Instinctively the two women rose to go, feeling it impossible to prolong an interview which was so trying to them all, and so hopelessly useless.

"Have you met with an accident?" Ruth glanced at the crutches on which the old woman was hobbling after them.

"Oh no, mum, thank Hiven ! The docthur calls it the paralyze uv me leg. He thinks Oi 'll niver joosht recover the use uv it, but Oi 'll not be afther losin' it aff. But the childher does mosht uv me shtandin' for me."

"Don't you three have nothin' to live on but what Mike c'lects playin' that old organ o' hizn?" asked Hannah.

"Oi do, mum, Oi am not complainin'. Ivery noight Moike shtops at Hornblower's fer an armful o' trousers to finish, an' the next noight he retoorns thim."

"How much do you get for your work?" Ruth inquired.

"Thurrteen cints the pair, mum."

"Thirteen cents! I never! Wall, 'f that ain't oppressin' the widder 'n' orphans, I ain't no judge," exploded Hannah.

"Is there much to do on each pair?"

"Danny, bring Granny the throusters, me man, an' me shpecks. There, mum, ye'll see. There 's the bit shtiffnin' to baste an' stitch in the bottom of aich leg, the loinin' goes into the waisht-band, three pockets musht be tackted, — three corrnors aich, — shtays fur two buttons, an' the sewin' on of eight buttons, an' Oi sews thim toight, be the same token. Thin it 's complate, — savin' the boocle on the back-shtrap, an' six button-holes, lave alone the ticket which goes on ivery pair."

"Of all things!" murmured Hannah under her breath.

"How many pairs can you finish in a day, Mrs. Finerty?" Ruth asked.

"Moshtly three, mum, whin me eyes is n't throublin'."

Ruth glanced at a cheap, shadeless lamp that stood on a shelf, and noticed that its chimney was nearly opaque with smoke and dirt.

"Do you sew at night?"

"Whin Danny does not take croup, mum," Granny answered cheerfully. "Thin sure, Oi can't lave the darlint that long Oi c'uld make a button-hole. But me frind Mrs. O'Hara tells me the b'y'll outgrow that, thank God!"

"Poor Michele!" sighed Ruth, as they descended the stairs.

"What's the matter now, I'd like t' know? I hope ye ain't sighin' like the north wind 'bout 'n organ-grinder with a home 's good 's that is. That's what I call flyin' in the face o' Prov'dunce," reproached Hannah. "Ye'd better be gittin' down on yer knees fer thankfulness instid. To be sure, Mis' Finerty is awful Irish, an' queer-lookin' — an' actin' too, for that matter, — but she would n't hurt a hair o' Michele's head, an' mebbby that's more 'n you could 'a' said 'bout his own mother, 'f she was an I-talyun."

"But the place was so dirty!"

"Of course 't was, an' I can't abide shif'lessness; but like 's not you could n't scrub an' clean up 'f you was lame, an' had to make pants at thirteen cents a pair. I never!"

"Did you notice a likeness of Mrs. Finerty scrawled on the wall?" asked Ruth, to change the subject.

"Notice it? Well, now, it looked jest like her — puckers 'round her eyes an' mouth, an' her full cap-border, an' all. She looks 's if she was whittled out like 'n English walnut."

They turned a corner and met Michele, — organ on back, cold as it was, — with several pairs of trousers on his arm, looking very tired. At his heels was Piccolo.

"That there picter o' Mis' Finerty, on your

wall," demanded Hannah, without preface ; " who drawer'd it ? "

The boy's dark face glowed.

" Oh, me-a, meselve." His intonation was the very echo of Mrs. Finerty's.

" Well, I never ! If you ain't a beater ! I guess I 'd better git ye to drawer mine," she chuckled.

" We have been to see your friends, Michele," said Ruth, " and the next time we come I hope you will be at home."

Michele smiled, his brilliant teeth setting off the olive tint of his face.

They passed on, but that smile haunted Ruth long after she had put out her candle, and that night Hannah broke her record. Instead of a hymn with which she was wont to solace herself or exhort others, she was content with singing :

" Over the mountain and over the moor,
Hungry and barefoot, I wander forlorn ;
My father is dead and my mother is poor,
And I grieve for the days that 'll never return.

" Pity, kind gentleman, friend of humanity,
Cold blows the wind, and the night 's coming on ;
Give me some food for my mother for charity,
Give me some food, and I will be gone."



CHAPTER VIII.

A CHOICE OF DIFFICULTIES.

LATE in the autumn, Robert met with an accident at a game of base-ball, which sent him to bed, but was at first regarded as more annoying than serious. After he was able to be up and about again, however, he seemed languid and drooping, whether from confinement and lack of exercise or from some other cause. Dr. Alexander recommended mother and son to make a journey to the Florida coast, where indeed Robert responded to the influence of the softer climate and change of diet; but his lameness still lingered and he was easily fatigued. Then the doctor gave a stronger tonic, and ordered him to "favor" the offending limb till it should be fit for duty again. Moreover, — and this was the bitterest medicine of all to an ambitious boy, — when he returned it was decided to remove

him from school altogether. Robert's temper was not angelic; and he did not give up his place at the head of his division without a struggle. He argued, he coaxed, he entreated, he wept, but his mother was inexorable. Yet, when Ruth Havens was proposed for his teacher he accepted the compromise, and the cloud passed.

It was no sacrifice to Ruth to become an inmate of Mrs. Trumbull's home. When she was very young she had known Robert's mother as a "big girl," and had been taught by her in Sunday-school; Ruth was therefore aware of the mother's methods of dealing with her son, while Robert loyally loved Ruth and tried to please her.

It takes but few words to tell of the time which passed slowly and wearily. With the lengthening days, Robert's tasks grew lighter. More time was given to games and stories. There was slight change in him, — only a little more weakness, a little more fretfulness. His appetite failed, and nights seemed long. He was always trying to comfort himself with promises for the future. "Next week," he would say, "I shall be able to go to school;" or, "On St. Valentine's Day I shall have some fun;" or, "I shall be well enough to go to church Easter Sunday." At each disappointment he took courage to hope again, thus helping himself to bear pain and weariness which otherwise must have broken his spirits.

It was still March when Ruth found at her plate one morning a bunch of arbutus, — “May-flowers,” Robert loved to call them, — and she shrewdly guessed that she owed them to Michele. Robert also associated him with the flowers. With a smile, he took them in his thin hand, and smelled them lovingly.

“I know where Mike got these, for I told him long ago just where to find the first ones,” he said. “I am glad you like them, Miss Ruthy, for he calls you a ‘breek.’ Poor Mike! how he loves flowers! I am afraid he thinks I have forgotten him. But I have n’t. I lie awake, sometimes, trying to think what he can do to get a living better than grinding that old organ.”

“Did I tell you that he goes to night-school now?” asked Ruth, feeling like a hypocrite of the first order, since she was well aware that he did not know.

“Whew!” whistled Robert, his face lighting up. “He is a winner.”

Ruth had meant this for a happy surprise, and she was well rewarded for her pains.

“But you’ll be sorry to know that Michele does not care much to go, often staying away for a whole week at a time,” she pursued.

“Oh, he’d rather make pictures than do anything else,” Robert answered cheerfully. “But Mike’s all right. He’ll come out ahead yet.”

“I hope so, but he cannot make pictures yet.

He ought to learn to do something useful, so that he can earn a good living," objected Ruth.

"What do you think he could do?" Robert demanded eagerly. "I wish you would try to help him, Miss Ruthy. That would please me more than anything else; and you are always doing things to make me happy."

"Well, dear, I'll put on my thinking-cap."

"Will you really? Oh, I do thank you so much!"

A bright spot glowed on Robert's cheek, and his eyes shone. He reached a hand to pat Spero, who was always near. Ruth felt herself on forbidden ground, and was anxious to retreat; yet she was divided between responsibility to Mrs. Trumbull and her own conviction of duty to the two boys. Wisely deciding to bring to an end a matter so delicate, she began a story quite irrelevant.

In the mean while there had been a consultation of specialists concerning Robert's case. He knew of this, and had looked forward to it as a certain release from suffering. If the surgeons came to a definite decision, it was not then known; but, somehow, Robert did not improve, nor did his lameness disappear. A new appliance had been employed as a last resort, and it was whispered among the neighbors that if this failed, amputation would follow.

Ruth was the confidant of both mother and son.

To her loving ear Mrs. Trumbull declared the surgeon's verdict. It was Ruth who received visitors, concealing, as best she might, the real situation, since to reveal it would subject the mother to questioning and sympathy which she was yet unable to endure. On Ruth, Robert leaned for courage and for assistance in all the schemes of which his head was as full as when he used to concoct mischief and fun. Especially was he concerned about Michele's mind, body, and estate; for love, like an orchid, thrives on air.

"What I want, Miss Ruthy," he was always saying, "is something for Mike to do. Something better than washing dogs for a living."

Michele had been put in the way of turning an honest penny by beginning with Spero, under Hannah's supervision; and so well did he launder the old dog, without coming to an open rupture, that it had been an easy matter to increase the number of Michele's patrons in the business.

"I want him to get a place where he can earn something always; you see I can't help him now, and he must not starve."

"Starve! I should think not."

The white face flushed with pleasure.

"Well, what are you going to do about it?" he persisted. "I'll tell you what I've been thinking. If Mr. Holmes would take Mike this summer to do chores and keep his studio clean, it

might give him a chance to learn how to paint a little."

"Oh, dear!" exclaimed Ruth, "people do not do such things, Robert. It sounds like a Robinson Crusoe story." Ruth was thinking of the lily.

"Well, what did you think of, Miss Ruthy?" asked Robert, soberly.

"I've thought of a good many things, Robert, and you may be assured I shall not forget him."

"Oh, yes; but will you keep on thinking, very hard?" he urged, with the utmost confidence in her co-operation and wisdom.

"Yes, dear, very hard." And she did.

All this time, except at Christmas, when Michele had come to the "tree" with the other members of Ruth's class, Robert had seen him but seldom; once to arrange for Spero's baths, and afterward, whenever the old fellow was washed. Then Robert had given the Italian every possible direction and caution, prolonging the interviews to the uttermost minute. And whenever Spero appeared in fresh toilet, Robert would talk to him about his bath-master, conjuring the dog to save Mike trouble by keeping clean. If Mrs. Trumbull had heard him, she would have been touched by Robert's silent — perhaps unconscious — submission to the unspoken ban laid upon him to forego the sight of the lad whom he so loyally cared for and wished to help. Nevertheless, Michele had not been abandoned to his fate.

Ruth had tried to keep a watchful eye upon him, supplementing the strict necessities of life with a few comforts. To do more was out of her power. Of course the hand-organ was a summer breadwinner, and to supply an occupation for all the year round was Ruth's great anxiety. Through her connivance, her uncle had secured for him a route to deliver the "Morning Star," a scheme which yielded Robert unfeigned delight. Sometimes he would say: "I was awake this morning when Mike left the paper;" and Ruth wondered if his mother never felt a pang of regret in depriving her son of such poor comfort as an occasional sight of this waif. And the mother was ever wishing for some right way to give her boy the thing he longed for so.

The soft wind was whispering the secrets of spring. The air was laden with the earthy smell so sweet to the country-bred. Against the tender green of the budding willows, dark firs were festive in their fresh young spines, like the candles of a Christmas-tree. Here and there Robert's flower, so sweet and brave, pushed its pink fingers through the moist dead leaves. Brown sparrows peopled the leafless elms, looking, for all the world, like a crop of belated apples, — "frozen-thaws," Robert called them; and the first robins were chirping.

Johann was making the garden ready for the seeds, as Robert knew, and it occurred to him

that Michele would enjoy cultivating a plat of his own. Of course the suggestion was readily accepted, and to Mrs. Trumbull's surprise Michele was pleased to evince more enthusiasm in this than he had ever shown in anything else. "And why not?" she asked herself, as she remembered the lily. Ruth saw the Italian's dark face light up with pleasure, and was glad. Hannah proved the rule of her consistency by an exception. She said:—

"Now he kin hev all the posies he wants, an' need n't go 'round pickin' an' stealin,' 's the Prayer Book says."

One morning Robert's mother told him—very gently with his hand in hers—that the surgeons had decided upon amputation. She did not say it was the forlorn hope. Perhaps, however, he already divined the truth in her white face; but he bore the news without a word of complaint, scarcely with surprise. Not a tear dimmed his eyes. At first he was silent; but by degrees his courage mounted, and he began to talk of the time when he should be well again.

"Mother, there is one favor I want to ask," he said, as he wistfully stroked her cheek with a small wasted hand: "I would like to see Mike and tell him about it myself. He could n't get along without his legs for a single day, and he would make an awful fuss about it if he knew I'd lost one of mine. Besides," he added, with a little

tremor in his voice, "I want him to bring his old organ and play, all the time it is going on, to keep my mind off myself."

"To keep his mind off himself! Heaven help the dear boy!" thought Ruth, as she held a book before her eyes to hide the trickling tears.

"Besides," Robert went on, after a pause, "besides, I have wanted ever so much to hear that old organ again."

So Michele came. If he did not yet comprehend the points of difference between himself and Robert, he had at least made some progress in the discovery that there was a difference, and this was something. The salient features of his swarthy face were comparatively clean. His hands were not so black as they might have been painted. To be sure, his thick bushy hair was not yet amenable to brush and comb; but Michele's improved appearance testified that he had made their acquaintance at least, and that was much. The suit which Ruth had smuggled, for this occasion, into Mrs. Finerty's eyry, gave evidence that it had once belonged to a taller and heavier owner; but it covered the lad decently, and that was something too.

Seated beside Robert's couch, which had been wheeled out on the sunny sheltered porch, the two boys talked it over — within the hearing of a jealous ear — as unreservedly as the birds above them were twittering about their housekeeping.

If it was not so much of a shock to Michele as Robert had feared, this was due to Ruth's precaution ; for the Italian had cried himself to sleep about it the night before. She would not have dared to risk the chance of a scene, unless he were privately informed before the meeting.

"And now, Mike, you will play under the lilacs by my window while the doctors are here, won't you?" asked Robert.

"Bed-a you li-ive," fervently responded the organ-grinder, looking off at the horizon.

"They can't tell now just when it will happen, but Miss Ruthy will let you know."

"Weesh-a me, I haf-a wan monkey fo' dance," ventured Michele.

"Oh, I should n't see it, you know," comforted Robert ; "and see here, Mike : it is not any great thing to make a fuss about, I guess."

"Wad-a ees-a you geevin' me !" Michele laughed, with the air of one who has enjoyed amputations as a pastime all his life.

"And say, Mike : I have been saving my money to make you a little present. Mother knows about it, and she is willing." Robert drew from under his pillow a color-box, and offered it to his friend, who shrank back, blushing rosy red.

"No ; me, myselve-a don' wan'-a notheen," he said. "No play-a fo'-a beezneez."

"Oh, come, Mike ! I do not wish you to take it for pay. It is because I like you, you know,"

coaxed Robert, embarrassed. Ruth wondered if Michele would have taken it without so much as "By your leave," if nobody had seen him.

"Please take it. You will hurt my feelings if you don't," pleaded Robert. But the Italian showed no sign of relenting.

"You can make pictures to amuse me, you know; for I may be — kept in the house for some time," Robert pursued.

"Oh, no! Goin' fin'a lill dog. Goo'-by."

He darted off the porch, whistling to Piccolo, who at that moment was interviewing Hannah on the cooky question. Before Robert could call him back, Michele was out of hearing.





CHAPTER IX.

LOVE HOPETH ALL THINGS, ENDURETH ALL
THINGS.



THE surgeons had come. Everything had been made ready. In Robert's own pretty bedroom nothing was changed. The sunshine fell across the bed and filled the chamber with yellow light. In the little sitting-room adjoining, a surgical bed had been prepared which was to receive Robert's unconscious form; for in the tender love that would shield him even from the fear of pain, every possible detail had been spared him. So his courage was still unshaken. In his wan face not a sign of shrinking could be discerned, as, with arm around Spero's shaggy neck, he turned a smiling face toward Dr. Alexander and began inhaling the anæsthetic. Just then was heard in the distance Michele's hand-organ. Nearer and nearer it came. At first the "Marseillaise," played valiantly! It was evident that the Italian appre-

ciated the responsibility of distracting Robert's attention from himself.

"That 's right, my hearty ! Play away ! I hear you," he said, a faint glow tinting his cheek.

By the time Michele had reached the lilac-bushes the tune had changed. Robert had begun to respond to the anæsthetic. Nobody stirred or spoke till, opening his eyes, he whispered, —

"Please, mother, let him know — I — hea—r."

Moving softly to the window, she waved her handkerchief in signal, and turning, saw that Robert was no longer conscious. For the first time during that terrible trial Mrs. Trumbull found relief in tears.

Very gently they carried the child to the bed prepared for him in the other room. Kissing his pale forehead, the mother returned to wait with Ruth in Robert's bedroom till all was over. Hand in hand the two women sat in silence, in full view of the closed door, and within call. Spero wandered disconsolately about a little while ; then, flattening himself out like a tawny door-mat, with his black nose close to the threshold, he listened with uplifted ears. What a lifetime of suspense lay between the closing and the opening of that door ! And all the while Michele was turning the crank of his rickety old organ. Nobody listened, and yet the tunes following each other in dreary succession were pricked in notes

of fire on the hearts of the watchers. "Santa Lucia," a "Gondoliera," the duet from "Norma," and a scrap from "Il Trovatore," and once more the "Marseillaise," over and over again, without a moment's pause.

When at last the door softly unclosed, the nurse in white cap and apron beckoned to the women. With sinking heart the mother went in and took a seat beside Robert's cot. She wished him to find her at her post when he should waken. Taking his hand in hers, she waited. The air was stifling, the silence clamorous. Noiselessly nurse and surgeons moved about, putting things to rights. The old doctor was gathering up his instruments. Somebody opened the windows, pulling down the shades a little. The patient stirred.

"Mother!" The voice was faint and low.

"Yes, dear, mother is here," — pressing his hand; "but you must not talk yet."

"No, mother." Another silence.

"Did — did you — tell — Mi —" began Robert after a patient effort to keep still.

"Yes, my child, I told him. He is playing yet," she whispered.

This would never do. Dr. Alexander, who had been walking restlessly about, winking his eyes, and wiping his spectacles, now came to the bedside and said cheerily, —

"Come, come, Bobby! You must hurry up

now, and get well ! Don't think any more about that — or anything."

"No — no, sir." The boy seemed to fall asleep for a moment ; then, rousing himself again, " Doctor ! "

" Yes, Bobby ; but you must really keep quiet now," urged the old man.

" Yes, doctor, — only, please, how long will it take for my leg to grow out again ? " His wistful eyes were full of expectation.

" Tut, tut, Bob ! Did n't I tell you not to speak another word ? " and the dear old doctor stroked his white beard, while the corners of his mouth twitched, and his kind eyes grew dim. And the trusting child fell fast asleep, sure that all would be right. The mother, weeping bitter tears for the time when he should know the truth, kept her vigil beside him. Ruth stole out to carry the tidings Michele was longing for. He refused to be dismissed, and for very joy took heart of grace for another round, Spero barking and leaping beside him.

The next morning Hannah told Mrs. Trumbull that " that there I-talyun " had slept on the porch under Robert's window all night. " As if he was any good 'n case 'f a pinch," she said ; but she did not mention her own offer of a good warm breakfast to Michele, in token of her gratitude.

Though Michele had for some time been carry-

ing the "Morning Star," he had recently been given a longer route, so he told Hannah, and there was not much use in going to bed for such a "leetle vile."

Poor Hannah was herself pretty nearly a total wreck after that day's experience, but she never took in a single sail. Though her voice was too husky to sing successfully, or even to "hum," she thankfully repeated the words of the hymn to which many a trembling soul has clung in times of trial:—

"Fear not, I am with thee, oh, be not dismayed:
I, I am thy God, and will still give thee aid;
I'll strengthen thee, help thee, and cause thee to stand,
Upheld by My righteous, omnipotent hand."

The next day was Sunday. The sky was blue. The sun shone as it had a week before. The birds sang joyously. The soft wind cooed through the trees. The scent of gardens filled the air. The bees hummed lazily. The church-bells rang out a merry peal. But the Stone House was darkened. It was an anniversary in the church; and if the flowers and music were an incentive to some to enter it that day, let us hope the love of God crept into their hearts, to their souls' health.

"Here endeth the second lesson," said the rector, closing the great Bible. There was a hurried step in the aisle, a stir of disapprobation in the senior warden's pew, the choir exchanged

glances, and across the church a few young folks smiled ; for the sexton, unabashed, was making his way to the chancel with a message. Dr. Herrick was a man who ordered his services reverently, and to interrupt him was a grave offence, as the sexton well knew. Dr. Herrick received the message with a frown, and put on his glasses to read it, while the choir chanted, "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel !" When the anthem ceased, the rector, in a voice husky with emotion, asked the prayers of the congregation for a "dear sick child." Then every one knew that Robert was sore beset. The Angel of Death seemed to brood over the place. And when the rector prayed, *Or else receive him into those heavenly habitations where the souls of those who sleep in the Lord Jesus enjoy perpetual rest and felicity*, sobs were mingled with the fervent "Amen" of pastor and people.

Robert lay as one dead. His mother knew that she held her child by the slenderest thread. So white and still was he that Hannah told Ruth he reminded her of a "phantom flower" which in her youth she once possessed, whose juices and substance had been removed by some occult process leaving only the spirit of the flower. "And that's what we sh'll be in heaven, I b'leeve, when we sh'll all be changed," she said. "That's what it means by sayin' 'we die a nat'ral body, and we sh'll be raised a spirit'yull body.'

Only Robby, he don't have to wait till he gits there fer the change to begin."

"There is great comfort in the thought that 'heaven never echoed to a baby's cry,'" the rector had said, when he and Mrs. Trumbull sat by Robert's bed that afternoon. And she had replied without a tear, —

"His father is there, and I cannot ask that my child be spared, if he must suffer."

Together they knelt, with Ruth and Hannah, while Dr. Herrick offered a simple prayer, reverently repeating the "if it be possible" of our Lord's petition in Gethsemane.





CHAPTER X.

JOY COMETH IN THE MORNING.



ROBERT did not die. After the few conscious moments immediately succeeding the operation, he sank into a deathly stupor. "Still living," was the only response which Hannah could give to numberless inquiries that besieged the house for many days. Then he rallied valiantly, animated by a strong desire to get well. But despite all that loving thought could devise, he did not advance far toward recovery. He never lost his cheerful spirit, and at first seemed as happy as most healthy lads. Capable of being amused and entertained, fond of seeing his friends, — and who had so many as Robert? — he accepted his misfortune like a little philosopher, and made the best of it. He made it his business to grow strong, regarding his lameness as a temporary accident which would finally be repaired. His

cheerful allusions to his "new leg" were at first passed over unnoticed, his mother believing that the truth must come to him without the pain of expression. But there came a time when his impatience began to manifest itself. He wondered when the "plaguy thing" was going to begin to grow. He sometimes put an anxious question to Michele, whose non-committal expressions proved of great service in postponing the hour which they all dreaded. Fearing its effect upon his sensitive nervous system, they had put off and diverted Robert to the verge of deception; but one day — with a braver courage than ever sustained soldier on battlefield — Mrs. Trumbull told him, oh, how tenderly! that he must not expect to be again like other boys. She reminded him of great and good men who had borne pain and disappointment, and even deformity, rising above it all to better lives. She told the story of Beethoven, who, loving music with his whole soul, passed years and years in silence, deaf even to the sweet sound of applause which greeted his own masterpiece. She talked of crippled, sensitive Byron — of poor Milton, blind in the prime of his life. She tried to show Robert how he could be "gentle and thoughtful for others," — which, after all, is the only thing worth living for. She dwelt on the power to do good with money and influence. She assured him that to be a scholar was not a whit less

honorable than to be an athlete, which Robert had meant to become. Then she comforted him with the prospect of a substitute, which would serve him almost as well as his own leg. It was a terrible test of the child's stout heart. His whole nature rose up in protest. He raved, he stormed, he sobbed, he pleaded. With all the resistance of his strong will he resented his fate. Not even Spero could comfort him, though he whined and licked his little master's hand.

"It is n't fair," cried Robert. "Why did n't they tell me before it was done? I would rather have died than be a cripple all my life. Oh, it is too hard!"

This was almost more than the mother could bear; but she tried to comfort him, while there was even a note of cheer in her tender sympathy.

"I shall be nothing but a horrid old torso, such as Mr. Holmes makes us draw. I hate it," he wept.

"Well, dear," soothed the mother, "when you have your artificial leg, it will almost cheat yourself."

"Do you suppose I can run fast on it, mother dear?" he asked, a glimmer of hope drying the tear on his cheek.

"We shall see, Robby," she answered, not too confidently.

They knew then the secret of Robert's patient submission to the operation, which had seemed

trifling to him in comparison with the great end to be gained. His faith had carried him safely through his hour of trial. Should he now be suffered to fall beneath the burden of a disappointment which seemed heavier than he could bear? It was apparent that he had cherished a strong desire to romp like other boys, and every art was used to beguile him into his old hopefulness. All sorts of devices to encourage him were resorted to, that his strength might be sufficient for him. It was a long time before any one dared refer to the subject again. He lay quiet, passive, visibly failing, but never complaining. Michele was often allowed to see him, and every day, morning and evening, the sound of the hand-organ was heard in the land. Still he loitered on the way to recovery, and his mother's heart was very sore. With unflagging interest she sang and read and talked to him; she played games with him; she even sat through the agony of hearing Michele read aloud, — which in fact was but the daily reading-lesson, by a name far sweeter. It would have been funny, had she been less preoccupied, to hear the Italian, in his pretty patois, slowly plodding through the life of "Arabian" Lincoln, blissfully unconscious that he was giving his hearers not the faintest hint of the sense. It pleased Robert to think of himself as helping Michele, and it was now his mother's only comfort to please Robert. So, guarding him from the possible harm of the

companionship, willing to gratify Robert, she sat patiently through the ordeal. Hannah had openly come over to the enemy, and when it chanced that Robert was too weak, or perhaps sleeping, so that Michele could not be admitted, she was fain to render satisfaction to both dog and master by way of a doughnut or a piece of pie. When her conscience charged her with inconsistency, she excused herself with the plea, "for Bobby's sake," with the self-justifying clause that she was not "overly fond of Italyuns."

So, whenever Robert expressed a desire to see Michele, Hannah happened to be just going out to get a mouthful of fresh air, so she could arrange the visit as well as not. And that dreaded "next time," against which Mrs. Trumbull had so jealously set her face, came again and again, — always, it is true, under the eye of a third person, but the boys were not the less happy for that. Moreover, Hannah had come to tolerate Piccolo's footprints on her clean floor, because there was no other place for him; besides, she admitted to Robert, "He's a nawful folksey brute, 'f he is humbly."

Through those long and anxious days she was unconsciously crooning snatches of the hymns she had sung to Robert in his cradle, — oftenest, perhaps, —

"Hush, my dear, lie still and slumber;
Holy angels guard thy bed;
Heavenly blessings without number
Gently falling on thy head."

Michele's garden thrived famously under his care. Many were the means by which Johann taught him to improve and perfect the various plants and flowers, — Michele cultivated no vegetables.

Johann never tired of showing him the way to graft roses and bud them, and how to cross the different varieties of any plant. When, as it sometimes happened, Ruth needed flowers for her sick, or for the church, she was loaded with the choicest in Michele's garden, and Robert's room always blossomed with them.

About the middle of July another consultation resulted in sending Robert to the seashore. That was not an easy thing to accomplish ; but to Mrs. Trumbull all things were possible for his sake. Her mother-heart was sore. Her face, grown pale and wan, wore a set, strained smile. The trip was an experiment ; but much as she dreaded to risk it, she confessed her fears to no one. The preceding three months were like a terrible dream. How she had lived through them she never knew. Hannah might have testified that for days together the house had been as silent as the grave where Robert's father slept. Poor Spero wandered about in a wistful, bewildered way, his spirits broken. The old serving-woman's heart was very heavy, too. She did not blame her mistress for indulging her grief in her own way ; but it had been a greater deprivation to Han-

nah than any one could have guessed, that she dared not sing a note. Now, therefore, the prospect of any change was a real boon to her, — for of course Hannah was to go with Mrs. Trumbull and Robert.

The parting was bitter. Robert's weakness had unmanned him, and when he held Michele's hand and said "Good-bye ; I shall miss the dear old organ so !" his mother reproached herself for allowing the interview at all.

That evening Ruth sat alone with Robert, watching the sun as it sank behind the hill. She had been making plans for the happy return, and had received numberless commissions for his friends.

"I shall see Harold to-morrow," Ruth had said. "Have you any message for him, dear?"

"Tell him, Miss Ruthy, — tell him I am trying to get used to it ; but, oh, I am so disappointed — and so tired !" There was an ominous quaver in his voice, and he could not keep back the tears. She put her arms around him as she whispered, —

"Don't cry, dear boy, don't cry ; God knows."

"Oh, yes, He knows," the child quickly answered, trying to smile ; "but she does not," pointing with a transparent finger to his mother at her writing-table in the library. "And, oh, Miss Ruthy, Mike will be so lonesome without us. God will have to take care of him ; I can't."

He was sobbing now. Ruth pressed the little hand that lay in hers. She could not trust herself to speak.

“You will not forget Mike, will you, Miss Ruthy?” Spero whined and licked the hand that was tangling itself in his shaggy hair. Hannah came in with the lamp. And Ruth promised.





CHAPTER XI.

THALASSA !



THE next morning the Stone House was shut up. With sad faces the two women carried Robert away to meet the future, with whatever it might have in store for them, — loyal enough to suffer, brave enough to endure, fond enough to hope. The journey was made with surprising comfort ; — are not all things which we dread made easier for us than our fears? At the station Captain Merry's shiny weatherbeaten face was the first to be seen.

"Hello, my hearty !" cried the old man, as with the pumping motion characteristic of the genuine "salt," he shook the child's wasted hand.

"Ay, ay, sir," responded Robert, a flush of pleasure mounting to his forehead.

In the "barge" that stood waiting to receive him a comfortable couch had been prepared, and willing hands were not wanting to place him on it. Very slowly they drove along the dusty highway. As familiar objects appeared, one after another, Robert felt a thrill of the old delight. Nothing was changed; even the speckled hen that fluttered clucking across the road with her tipsy brood might have been the very same that frightened him last year by getting under the horses' feet. From the crane in Uncle Eli's little dooryard still hung the iron pot full of nasturtiums; and if he had harbored any doubt about it, the glittering array of pans and cans on Uncle Peniel's back porch would have assured Robert that this was at least the land of milk. Now and then vistas of the sea filled Robert with dear delight; how salt and sweet it smelled! how crisp the air was!

As they passed the store where loungers were wont to congregate, with the homely courtesy of country-folk the little company retired within; for they knew what precious freight the barge was bringing. Up easy slopes and down on the other side; past the "sunset seat" at the edge of the woods; across salt marshes red with russet grass; past Captain Duff's cabin where the lobster-flag was flying and the kittens were playing, they reached and skirted the beautiful bay. Foamy lines of the incoming tide were iridescent

with the sunset. Pools of water left here and there on the sandy shallows reflected its glory.

At the post-office they stopped under the friendly branches of bending willows where children were playing. Robert knew them all, and received their timid welcome with evident satisfaction. Without making the *détour* of the hotels, they entered a grassy lane, passing on the left some pretty cottages and the little church. To the right lay the ocean, blue and still. On through a bit of fragrant wood, over an open space from which signals were exchanged with the neighbors who were already waiting for them, all the time, gently ascending, — at last they turned abruptly into a sinuous private road, which suddenly terminated before a small homelike cottage, silver-gray with nature's own coloring.

They carried Robert to the wide piazza and placed him on a jutting seat almost overhanging the cliffs. With a sigh of content he shut his eyes and rested long, Spero snuggling close beside him, scarcely less glad than he.

The Trumbulls were not strangers in Quogville. For years they had summered there. With the "help" at the hotel, and the drivers of the barge, even with the grand mogul of the town, — Captain Merry, postmaster and skipper of the "'Lizy Ann," — Robert was hail-fellow. It was his highest ambition now to get well enough to sail again with Captain Merry ; for was he not always allowed

to hold ropes' ends and to make believe sailor in the most enchanting way? Perhaps it was this darling wish that stimulated his courage, since, after a few days of rest and salt air the old captain thought Robert did begin to "perk up a mite." Every change of the ever-changing sea and sky, every ebb and flow of the fickle tide, the whisper of the western wind, the roar of the surf, the sighing of the pines, the white sails by day, the flashing lights by night, were sources of never-ending delight to the restless boy who had so long been shut out from loving companionship with nature. The long procession of "rockers" returning at night from their arduous daily occupation made pleasant signals to Robert as he lay on the porch watching them. Children brought him star-fishes and mosses and ferns and shells. Young men and maidens vied with each other in little attentions, reading or singing to him in the long sleepy afternoons, when his mother was glad to sit by, a happy listener. And Cap'n Duff, the lobster-man, offered his blackest and friskiest kitten at Robert's shrine.

One day Uncle Eph appeared with a famous pair of crutches, fashioned with a sailor's skill, for Robert's "temporal" use, he explained, — a word which sufficed as well as another, since it conveyed a hint that the interval was short before the "j'inted leg" would make the boy as good as new. When, after many experiments, Robert first walked

abroad with the new crutches, the Captain said it reminded him of the time he saw the "king of Portugul a-marchin' with his rettynoo;" — so many anxious friends attended the child's uncertain steps. Indeed, even after he had become quite expert in their use, Hannah manifested great uneasiness whenever he was intrusted to the sole care of Captain Merry; since, as the Captain had lost an eye, an accident to Robert was always possible. She was ever a discourager of experiments, and the upshot of the matter was that all excursions thereafter were wisely made under Hannah's special supervision. Many a happy hour did Robert enjoy as he lay looking down upon the surf-beaten rocks half-a-hundred feet below, listening to "Uncle Eph's" oft-told tales of apocryphal adventure, punctuated with Hannah's exclamations of ever-new admiring wonder.

So Robert fared on toward returning health, and Hannah's hymnal was searched for thankful lays, with which the cottage resounded from morning till night.

Ruth's letters were a constantly recurring source of pleasure to them all. One day, however, Mrs. Trumbull received one which was never seen by Robert.

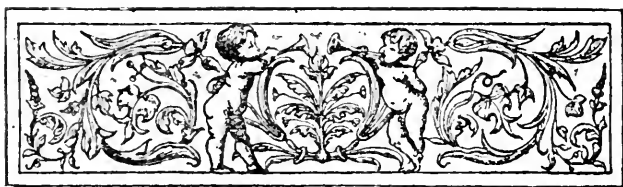
"I feel responsible for Michele [so the letter ran], and I have tried to keep a watchful eye on him since your departure has shut out heaven for him. Last

week I was going toward the river, where the crowded street makes the crossing dangerous for foot-passengers, when a little way in front of me I saw Michele and Piccolo. I am sorry to write it, but the beastie wore around his grimy neck Spero's little lost collar. He was keeping close to his master's heels when a cart driven at a furious rate struck the poor thing and passed over him. I saw Michele stoop, pick up the dog, and hugging it to his breast, disappear in the crowd; but not before I had seen his face: he looked like a mother bereft of her child. I shall never forget it, — so stern, yet so piteous. That evening Harold went to see Michele, taking with him Robert's last letter, for a crumb of comfort; but Michele and Danny had gone out to bury poor Piccolo, so he left the letter. We have not seen Michele since, but hope he may be at Sunday-school to-morrow."

Mrs. Trumbull glanced at her own boy, sleeping in his wheeled chair, as she folded the letter, and her heart swelled with pity.

"Poor boy!" she sighed, recalling Michele's inscrutable face with its lights and shadows. But she resolved to keep Ruth's letter to herself, unwilling to give Robert one unnecessary pang.





CHAPTER XII.

OCCASION RUNNETH IN ADVANCE OF MAN.



THE Captain's visits were always timed to suit his customers, — if a postmaster can be said to have customers, — or when the tide did not serve ; for he was a great favorite among the boarders. Indeed, he was sometimes obliged to cancel an engagement with Robert by reason of the demands of some sailing party. It so happened that his attention had been diverted from the cottage for some time, and Robert was half-cross and wholly unreasonable about it. Moreover, it was evident that a storm was brewing, and sundry twinges in the poor child's leg did not tend to amiability of temper. The sun was shining palely. The sky was translucent and all shadows were vague. The horizon grew hazy. Ships looked like phantoms. A few white-caps skimmed across the *crêpy* sea. The wind began to purr softly. A casement rattled as if shaken by

unseen hands. The air was stifling and the barometer falling. Hannah closed and locked the windows, and turned the spout from the eaves into the cistern. Spero was called indoors. Windy gusts tossed the pine needles in showers over the cliffs. A zigzag gleam shot across the sky. A growl of thunder, and the storm fell. Long and heavily it rained, the wind increasing at nightfall. Robert was restless. The wind always made him unhappy. When bed-time came he begged to be allowed to wait just a little longer, protesting that he could not sleep when the wind "cried so."

"Hark!" whispered Hannah, trying to peer out into the blackness from behind the corner of a window-shade. "I thought I heard somebody or 'nuther tryin' to find the knocker."

The next moment they all distinctly heard steps on the piazza, — uncertain, stumbling steps they were, too.

"Who 's there, I 'd like ter know?" cried the woman, in a gruff, loud voice.

"Me," was the irrelevant answer.

"Me! Well, who 's 'me'?" she called, louder still.

"Mike."

Robert almost sprang to the door himself. Bracing herself cautiously, to admit the boy without being blown down, Hannah turned the lock. Sure enough, there was Michele! A ghost of

himself, hatless, coatless, drenched, frightened, half-starved, but glad beyond telling, he had come to the haven where he would be, without a question of his welcome. He was staggering under the weight of his old organ, about which he had wrapped his coat for additional protection. The two women did not exchange a glance. No matter what might come, was not this one of God's children sent to them for shelter?

"Now there will be a man in the house, mother," rejoiced Robert, when Michele had been warmed and fed. "We need not be afraid of anything, if you got safely through such a storm as this. You 'll stay all summer, won't you, Mike?" he continued sweetly. "You see the Cap'n has too much to do, and we need somebody terribly. Besides, I'd rather have you than anybody else, — would n't you, mother?" If she did not reply, it might have been because she was busy, and did not hear; but that did not trouble her son.

Little by little they drew from Michele the story of his sudden appearance and the terrible journey, whose sufferings cannot be described with a gold pen. He never spoke of Piccolo — poor boy! — never complained of hardship.

"Could-a no more leef een dat-a place," he confessed; and so he had run away to find Robert. The postmark on Robert's letter had served to help him find his way to Quogville, and by dint

of stealing rides on freight trains, walking till he was footsore, begging an occasional lift on a farm-wagon, moneyless and hungry, he had found his way hither in a condition of pitiful exhaustion.

The two women talked it all over that night after the boys were snugly bestowed, — the one in the garret, the other in his pretty bedroom looking out to sea.

“And all for love of our Robby!” Hannah summed up.

“Poor Michele!” sighed Robby’s mother. “I wonder what will finally become of the boy.”

Hannah bestowed a withering look upon her, then bustled about as if seeking an escape-valve for her indignation. A peculiarly appropriate hymn occurred to her mind, which, however, she was discreet enough to refrain from singing. On general principles, she had little faith in foreigners or their good intentions, but she regarded Michele as a heaven-sent responsibility.

“Become of him?” she repeated. “Why Mis’ Trumbull, how can a body ’xpect to git to heaven, I want ter know, ’f they don’t feed the lambs, — not ’s I can say but what that there younkitt may be a roarin’ wolf in sheep’s clo’s, but he’s got to be took care of, all the same. I never!”

Mrs. Trumbull did not reply. She sat long looking into the fire, scarcely thinking; yet her mind was busy enough. It was late when Han-

nah began to set the room in order for the night, but neither remarked upon the hour.

“Poor Hannah!” thought the mistress; “I wish I could discuss this with her. She is so downright, she would tell me the truth, no matter how unwelcome, but —”

“Some time,” thought the faithful servant, “she’ll be glad o’ somebody to speak to, — let alone ungratitude an’ all that.”

The next day was still stormy; nevertheless Hannah persuaded the milkman to convey a message to Captain Merry to the effect that she desired immediately a suit of clothing wherewith to clothe Michele when he should waken from a long and heavy sleep. And the old sailor was the last man to fear a little water, when a possible gossip made it desirable to brave the weather.

So it came to pass that when, about noon, the Italian opened his eyes, he found dry clean garments waiting for him, Hannah having relieved him of those in which he had arrived. In the mean while Robert was in a state of eager excitement; and when at last Michele made his appearance, looking not much the worse for his long fast from food and sleep, it was indeed a happy moment. Mrs. Trumbull confessed to herself that there was nothing else to do under the circumstances but to suffer Michele to stay at the cottage. He was inoffensive, quiet, and

cheerful, and a journey to the nearest town made him presentable ; for when he was clean, the boy was almost handsome. Still her heart misgave her, even while she was yielding consent.

Robert found great satisfaction in his friend's attentions, which were constant and unobtrusive. For the first week after his appearance the weather made Robert a prisoner, dependent upon Michele for all communication with the village. Upon him also, in a certain sense, Robert depended for amusement ; for he was tired of indoor sports unshared by another. The color-box, which Michele had been so unwilling to accept, and which was buttoned safely under his shirt during his perilous journey, now became a large factor in the boys' lives ; for Michele was master of a rude skill which was a never-failing source of entertainment to Robert, and Michele's sketches were forcible, if not artistic. A spray of arbutus, a profile of himself, of Robert, of Danny or Granny ; a bit of country road, such as the poor fellow had never seen till now ! Was it accident that he drew no more torsos ? Here was a "scrap — weeth a cop," — so the artist called it, — in which, as a matter of course, Piccolo took a leading part, and as a matter of course got the worst of it. Much better than in words did Michele bring out the characteristics of all parties in the row by a few touches of his brush. A red dot

on the policeman's nose, for example, went a great way to represent his habits. A bare spot on Piccolo's back indicated the result of the quarrel so far as he was concerned, and a mud-beplastered organ told the rest of the story, — modesty perhaps, or its complement, omitting the personality of the painter himself.

They busied themselves on rainy days with inventions, — as what boy does not? — though whenever Michele's opinion was asked on a point of mechanics not apparent to the dullest observer he looked helpless. It was touching to see them together, — the body of the one so strong and lithe, his swarthy cheeks glowing with health; that of the other a frail tenement for a dauntless and gentle soul. Michele never alluded to Robert's misfortune, even indirectly, but treated him as if he were the robust boy that he once was; yet it was on Michele's strong right arm that Robert oftenest leaned. The captain doted on Michele, pleased to claim acquaintance with a live "I-talyun."

"He 's a likely sort of a chap," the captain confided to his cronies nightly assembled at the post-office. "He can't help havin' an impediment in his speech. They all have it. In my v'y'ges I've heard hundreds on 'em all talkin' baby-talk, or leastways what sounded like it."

Michele's advent in Quogville had excited much disapproval among the piazza-gossips; but

before the summer was gone, with his discordant old organ he had lured all the piazza-children to the cliffs, — just as the children of the slums had often followed him. And more than once his ready services were impressed for some impromptu frolic where young men and women footed it to his inspiring measure; for Michele was an enthusiast when he played.

“Hannah, I think I shall take Robert to Europe, this winter,” Mrs. Trumbull said, one evening, when the two women were alone. Hannah picked up Spero with emphasis, and put him into his basket. “I shall be sorry to leave you for so long,” Mrs. Trumbull continued.

“I don’t see no airthly reason why you should, nuther,” answered the woman, curtly.

“Would you like to go, Hannah?”

“Me? No, ’ndeed! not ’s long ’s I ’m able to buy a piece of solid ground to be buried decent,” returned Hannah, promptly.

“Do you mean that I have no reason for going?”

“Yissum, I mean jest that. The idee o’ goin’ missionaryin’ to the heathen! What ’s a Christian country fur, I want ter know, ’f ’t ain’t to larn other folkses children to do right? They ’re a-settin’ ’s thick ’s spatter at yer very door, a-beggin’ to be convarted; an’ ’nstid o’ that, folks steps over ’m to git to meetin’ an’ hear ’bout throwin’ babies under the car o’ Jug-

gernot, before they larn to lie an' steal. I never ! ”

A faithful “hammer of the Lord,” Hannah delivered her blows with the precision of an expert. Many a time she had promised herself to give Mrs. Trumbull a “good talkin’ to ;” but when the conversation had been adroitly steered toward an occasion, somehow it always veered suddenly in a different course. Now, her mistress suffered her to give vent to her overcharged feelings, without interruption, listening if not with humility at least with patience.

“Satan ollers finds some mischi’f still fer idle hands t’ do, an’ he’s got a reg’lur faculty fer gittin’ ’round boys, too. ’F I hed a knack fur doin’ on ’em good, I b’leeve I’d stop an’ think twict b’fore I done it up in a nimbydered napkin an’ buried it, ’thout no idee ’f it’s sproutin’. There ! ”

“I do not think I understand you, Hannah,” Mrs. Trumbull said at last. “You know I only thought of going for the sake of our dear boy.”

To be included in the partnership of “our dear boy” touched Hannah ; yet she refused to be beguiled from her purpose. She went on : —

“Fer Robby’s sake ! Wall, I never ! ’Tain’t the way he’d spend the money ’t ’s comin’ to him. ’T would n’t a’ ben his pa’s way, nuther.” Then, relenting, she added tenderly, “Ye poor child ! Has God got to take yer own little ‘ewe

lamb' away from ye out an' out, b'fore ye larn to feel fer a moth'less boy?"

Without waiting for a reply, Hannah left her mistress to ponder this matter in her heart ; but as an aid to reflection, perhaps, the woman straight-way began to sing : —

“Sin hath a thousand treach'rous arts
To practise on the mind ;
With flatt'ring looks she tempts our hearts,
But leaves a sting behind.”

That night Mrs. Trumbull could not sleep. The great clock in the dining-room lifted up its ancient voice and loudly called away the hours. Hannah's freedom of speech had been irritating. As the night advanced Mrs. Trumbull grew more and more annoyed, and of course more wakeful with increasing annoyance, until with the morning light she had firmly made up her mind to carry out her first intention at all hazards. Before the late breakfast, she had so far proceeded as to write and post two letters announcing her plans, — asking advice afterwards, — the one to Mrs. Herrick, the other to Dr. Alexander. To Ruth she had already dropped a hint of her “inspiration,” as she was pleased to call it.

Mrs. Trumbull had often wondered that the letter which she had detained Robert to mail one morning so long ago had never been acknowledged. Now, as she saw Michele returning with

a plump mail-bag, it again recurred to her mind ; and almost as if she had spoken her thought, Hannah asked whether she had ever heard from it.

"No, and the check has never passed through the bank. Somebody is keeping it."

"If that ain't cheek," Hannah returned indignantly.

"If the money reached the woman in time, it is all right ; but I certainly should have written her about it if I had not mislaid her address."

"When was 't you sent it, I want ter know?" persisted Hannah.

"Robert, do you remember taking a very important letter to mail for me, a long time ago?"

"Yes, mother ; it was the Saturday before my birthday picnic."

Robert bent over his book, and she returned to her conversation with Hannah.

"If I had dropped the letter in the corner box," she pursued, "I might have thought it was lost ; but when Robert took it to the post-office himself, I gave myself no uneasiness about it."

Robert was not reading now. When he heard his own name, his attention was naturally diverted ; and the conversation which followed made him too unhappy to read. His first impulse was to confess at once that he did not take the letter to

the post-office ; but he knew that Michele would be suspected, if the truth were known : so he held his peace. With a heavy heart he waited for a chance to speak with Michele alone. At last it came.

"Mike, did you mail that letter I gave you one day last summer?" he asked.

Michele hung his head and did not reply.

"Then what did you do with it?"

"Me, myselve-a cand-a fin' nowhere."

"See here, Mike, you must know where it is. There was money in that letter ; and if you did not mail it, mother will be very angry."

"Money! *Schack!*" corrected Michele.

"How did you know that? Did you open it?"

"No."

"Where is it, then?"

"Don'-a cand know." The boy spoke dejectedly.

"You've *got* to know, Mike, and *tell* me, too." Robert's eyes flashed.

"Yas, ledda ees-a los'."

"Are you telling me the truth? I have always stood up for you, Mike. If you tell me a lie now, I'll never speak to you again."

"Oh, yas, tell-a you drue. Los'-a ledda."

"Oh, Mike! what shall we do! Mother will not believe you, nor Hannah; but I do," he added loyally.

The boys were passing along the top of the cliff, and Robert's penetrating treble carried his last words to the startled ear of his mother in a sheltered nook below. "Oh, Mike! what shall we do! Mother will not believe you, nor Hannah; but I do."





CHAPTER XIII.

THE END OF A RAINBOW.

IT was not long before Mrs. Trumbull received replies to her letters. The first was from Dr. Alexander, and her fingers trembled as she broke the seal.

(First Letter.)

SPRINGVILLE, Sept. 11, 18—.

Mrs. Robert Trumbull,

Quogville, Maine:

MY DEAR MARY,—I read in your letter, just received, that you wish to spend this winter abroad for Robert's sake. If that is the case, don't go. The chances are against any great benefit to him in making the voyage in the late autumn, as you propose.

He will not be strong enough for much sight-seeing, and you will find it duller to shut yourself in with him among strangers, than at home.

But Mrs. Herrick reads quite another story between the lines. If she is right, and Robert's mother is restlessly wishing a change, go, dear child,

go by all means. You have earned a long rest, and Bob will not mind a bit of shaking up for his mother's sake. It will really do him no harm, I think, and there is always the possible advantage in change of climate. And if, as I guess, he is eager to go, you will make no mistake. Inclination is always to be considered in such cases, -- even humored.

We are already beginning to feel lonely, and Ruth is disconsolate at the prospect. But young folks are soon consoled, and we elders do not complain.

Asking advice is only a formality, remember; and, so that you shall feel no embarrassment in slighting it, I send you both kinds.

Let us hear your decision soon, and put us out of our misery.

Love to the bravest, best boy in the world. I am,
my dear Mary,

Your obedient servant,

HUGH ALEXANDER.

(Second Letter.)

THE RECTORY, Monday, Sept. 11.

Go, Mary dear, if it is best for the dear invalid. We all need you here; but do not consider that, if you find it necessary to leave us. Still, is it essential to Robert's recovery? I can't help the feeling that he would be better at home; for only Americans know how to be comfortable in winter.

Some of my infant schemes are languishing without you, and new ones are hatching which you can foster. Why not come back and shelter them under your wing?

Lovingly yours,

HELEN HERRICK.

P. S. Do not regard Mrs. Herrick. This is an affair in which you must be your own counsellor. We shall miss you both; but if it is the right thing for you to go, it will be good discipline for us.

What will Hannah do? But of course you will make wise provision for all contingencies in any event.

God bless and direct you!

Faithfully your friend,

NORMAN HERRICK.

PP. S. What would become of Michele?

RUTH.

It is easy to conceive of Mrs. Trumbull's concern for her boy after having overheard his appeal to Michele as they passed above her on the cliff. It is also natural to suppose that these letters served to confirm her determination to put the sea between the boys. Already, with that end in view, she had of late dwelt much on the delights of an Italian winter, hoping to waken Robert's enthusiasm in seconding her plan.

The air was getting crisp and the other cottages were shut. Only a handful of boarders were staying late at the hotels to revel in reminiscent pleasures of the good old times when things were primitive and visitors few. Indoors Hannah was marshalling her clumsy and kindly helpers; and without, the Captain was superintending the battening down of all the doors and windows. It was curious how often Hannah

asked the old man's opinion upon indoor matters, — quite as well satisfied as if she had cherished the slightest intention of profiting by it.

It was their last afternoon at the cottage, and mother and son had established themselves in a warm niche in the rocks — known as "Robert's seat" — to watch the ebbing of the last tide. To Mrs. Trumbull's jealous eye Robert seemed abstracted and dull; but she strove to comfort herself with the thought that to all of us, last things are sad, as she set herself to directing his thoughts into a more cheerful channel.

"Robert, should you like to spend this winter in Italy?" she asked.

"Really, mother?" he answered eagerly.

"Yes, there is no reason why we should not go, if it would make you happy." A load of care slipped from her shoulders, like Christian's pack, when she saw Robert's bright face.

"And take Mike?"

"Oh, no, dear! we could not do that. He will go home with Hannah for the winter."

"Then I don't want to go."

"Do not be unreasonable, Robert. You cannot expect to have Michele with you after we leave here, you know."

"Why not, mother? I can't see why."

"My dear boy, can you not see that he is — that he cannot be your friend, under any circumstances?"

"But he is my friend already. I don't expect to have him adopted exactly, of course, but — "

"Adopted, Robert ! I should think not."

"But if we go away so far, he may get to going again with wicked boys, and — such things."

"Well, dear, we need not decide to-day. Let us think about it. Perhaps you will some time be sorry to have refused such an opportunity, if you give it up now."

"No, I shall not," — this with emphasis. "I don't wish to go abroad at all. I am sure of that this minute."

A constrained silence fell between them. Robert's eyes shone darkly, as he tossed bits of rock into the chasm below. Mrs. Trumbull sat motionless, her eyes fixed on the line dividing sea and sky. Robert was the first to speak.

"Oh, mother, I can't tell you how I feel about Mike ! He needs me more than ever now. We must not leave him with that horrid old woman."

"Why does he need you so much now, dear? "

"I've heard you say that father was a friend to such people, so it can't be wrong. Please, please stay at home !" He was weeping bitterly.

"What is it, Robert?" she coaxed. "You know mother is always ready to hear when things go wrong."

"But you have n't any idea how wrong things

are," sobbed the boy. "Oh, mother, I did not mail that letter. I gave it to Mike, and he lost it."

"Robert!" He felt the change in her tones, and it dried his tears.

"Yes, mother, he did; and I dared not tell, for fear you would — blame him."

"How do you know he lost it?"

"He told me so." Robert's eyes flashed warningly.

"Oh, my son! how could you put such a temptation in his way? You knew his failing."

"He *did* lose it. I know you think he stole it; but he did not. I was sure you would not believe him, so I did not tell you," answered Robert, hotly.

"You have done Michele a wrong by hiding this from me. He knows you will keep his secrets, and he will take advantage of it."

"Mother, will you not believe me?" Robert was sitting up very straight now, a red spot burning on either cheek. "Mike did not keep the letter; he only lost it, going home."

"Well, dear, I shall try to think as you do," she replied soothingly, feeling that the strain had already taxed his strength.

"And will you stay at home?" he asked.

"Can't you trust me to do what is for the best, dear?" she said.

"Inclination is always to be considered," kept

ringing in her ears. Plainly she must either give up her project, or win Robert's hearty approval. How she should do this was not apparent: so she shouldered her pack again, and Care wrote his autograph on her fair brow.

The next morning the barge backed up to the cottage again. The returning party was very different from the forlorn hope which had come in it two months before. Of course Captain Merry personally conducted them to the station, and watched them out of sight; and of course Hannah indulged many a misgiving about the wisdom of so soon making the journey. Once aboard the train, however, she settled herself to entertain the boys with the oft-told story of "When I was a little girl," and refrained from "henderin'" Mrs. Trumbull, who, she shrewdly guessed, was "wras'lin' with some Apollyon 'r nuther."

"I wish to massy I knowed what she's up to now!" thought the old woman, whose very vitals were gnawed by curiosity. "Anyhow, I do b'lieve she's gittin' out inter the light. I never! How I wish I durst sing jest one stanza 'f 'Oh, bless the Lord, my soul!' It 'uld be monstrous relievin'."



CHAPTER XIV.

THE NEXT THING.

IT is not for a moment to be supposed that Michele had quitted Mrs. Finerty and Danny without many misgivings and secret tears. The idea of forsaking them had never entered his head, nor had it entered his heart to doubt his welcome when it should suit his humor to return. Ever present with Michele had been Robert's parting cry, "I shall miss the old organ so ; " and Michele's flight had been actuated partly by the desire to gratify his friend, and partly to escape the life which had become intolerable without Robert and Piccolo. He had left for Mrs. Finerty the precious gold-piece which Robert had given him ; and, having pawned Spero's collar for a trifle, he had estimated the sum-total as equivalent to his own earnings were he to stay at home.

In the natural and generous provision which Mrs. Trumbull had intended to make for Michele

during her own absence she had counted without the principal; for when, as a sort of preparation for her general scheme, she had cautiously approached him on the subject of abandoning Arrow Place and all its associations, he had firmly refused to desert Mrs. Finerty, — whether from love or gratitude was not apparent.

However, what with Robert's reluctance to make the journey, and Dr. Alexander's advice concerning it, she admitted to herself that she had not the right to insist upon carrying out her original plan.

Then it came to pass — naturally and without apparent stress of spirit — that she opened her house again, and the European trip was indefinitely postponed. During the process of unpacking and rearranging, Robert was hilariously happy. His "new leg," but lately adjusted, made it possible for him to explore rooms which he had not entered for a year. For days he was completely absorbed in his modified means of locomotion, — of which, however, he was not yet sure enough to be trusted quite by himself. But was not Michele happy to be Robert's shadow? And what pleased Robert better than to be so worthily reflected! He sat in every chair, he looked in every cupboard, he put himself in the way of boxes and bales and trunks. But the new order of things could not last long, for Michele was going to school as soon as it opened; — to his own

secret regret, let it be owned, for he preferred the street and freedom. Robert, too, dreaded the change, much as he wished it. Meanwhile, the boys were making the most of Michele's reprieve, spending a part of every day together; for Michele had carried out his original intention of going back to Mrs. Finerty directly upon his return to Springville.

And she? When, occasionally, he had spent a night away from her, she had never wasted anxiety upon him; so his absence had cost her no apprehension until the second day after his disappearance, when a soiled and crumpled envelope came to light, containing the gold and silver and copper which were to go toward keeping herself and Danny through the summer. When she came to grasp the significance of this liberality, the sluices of her tears were opened; for she "never knew what a precious he was" until she lost him. Bitterly did she lament him, reproaching herself for possible kindness omitted or punishments administered, and she taught Danny to say a prayer for the soul of Michele in purgatory.

But history repeats itself; and, once assured of his safety, as she beheld him in flesh and blood, decently clothed, well-shod, cleaner, taller, and happy, her wrath knew no bounds. She charged him with thanklessness; she blamed him for leaving her; she reproached him for returning.

Michele defended himself in very broken English against the fluent Irish of Mrs. Finerty; and Danny, — neutral as to the argument, — happy in the fact of Michele's return, could only fall upon his neck, weeping for joy.

When at last Michele began to turn the crank of the old organ, Mrs. Finerty surrendered unconditionally, throwing her apron over her head, to mingle her tears with Danny's. The first act was over. Michele was the hero of Arrow Place from that day forth, and Danny was his henchman.

Hannah was rather disappointed that the Italian cared so little for "book-larnin'." She had made it her business to give him wholesome advice on that score, doubtless feeling, in a large measure, responsible for his temporary presence in the house, and flattering herself with the burden — often irksome, it is easy to guess — of changing Mrs. Trumbull's plans to include the lad. Poor Hannah! From her stores of other days — which she was prone to dwell upon at length, whenever she could secure a listener — she brought out a well-thumbed copy of "Watts on the Mind," recommending it to the boys as "splendid readin'." She assured Michele that it would make a man of him, as she herself could testify, — and she had read it from cover to cover, with the "perface by Emerson to boot," when she was Michele's own age. Then, with the re-

sponsibility of impartiality burdening her soul, she did not fail also to exhort Robert to diligence.

“’F I was you, Robby,” she said, “I would spruce up an’ study hist’ry ’s yer pa did. He was ter’ble fond of it, an’ he b’longed to a hysterical ’ciety an’ read dretful interestin’ pieces to the meetin’s. I should n’t wonder a mite ’f you’d be ’s smart ’s yer pa, ’f ye was to try.”

Robert was a good deal spoiled in these days; and what mother under the same conditions could resist the spoiling? He amused himself with playing countless pranks on Michele, who received them good-naturedly, without repaying them in kind, — much as he had taken Robert’s blows at their first meeting. Perhaps that was fortunate for the duration of their friendship, since the practical joker regards his own habit as odious in another. But an Italian is by nature a ready conspirator, and this one aided and abetted Robert loyally.

“Thet there Dago ’s a reg’lar machine fur Robby’s mischeevous plots,” Hannah had said one day when her righteous soul was vexed by an attempt upon her own peace of mind. It happened in this wise. One morning while Hannah was in the midst of a revolution in the kitchen, dressed to suit the occasion and with a handkerchief tied over her head, the door-bell rang furiously, and a card was brought to Robert. The kitchen door was ajar, and Hannah,

enjoying her musical privileges to her heart's content, scrubbed away to the rhythm of her tune. Robert pretended to read.

"‘Captain Eph. Merry, Quogville, Maine!’" he shouted. "Whew! Hear that, Mike! Bring him in, bring him right in here!" Bang went the kitchen door, and Hannah's song stopped in full career.

"How do you do, Cap'n?" cried Robert, at the top of his voice. "Walk right into the kitchen, Cap'n; you'll find Hannah there, all right."

With heavy step Michele strode towards the door and laid a noisy hand on the knob. Up the back stairs scurried Hannah, followed by derisive laughter from the two boys. Michele contented himself with an improvised luncheon that day, hurrying away without facing Hannah; since Robert was sure she would lay the blame on Michele rather than on himself. In this case, however, Hannah insisted that she knew they were up to their tricks, and that she was trying to help them carry out what she called a "powerful poor joke."

Yet there were times when Robert was very unhappy. Fully persuaded of his friend's innocence, he knew well that it was beyond his power to convince either his mother or Hannah that Michele had not stolen the letter. Then, the fact that there was any reservation between his

mother and himself, and that perhaps the person for whom the check had been intended was suffering from its loss, weighed upon his spirits when he was alone. His only comfort was that as yet Michele was saved from conviction of guilt. Moreover, Robert grew more and more to cherish a secret desire to remove Michele from his companions, and, if possible, to provide for him a better home. Robert had sorrowfully given up his darling wish that his own roof should shelter the boy, yet he never ceased to ponder over the possibility of some other place where Michele would be safe from harm.

Robert was not yet equal to school, and Ruth was to be again installed in Mrs. Trumbull's household in the old capacity of teacher and friend, — an arrangement always satisfactory to everybody.

In the interval of time between Michele's exit and Ruth's appearance, Mrs. Trumbull and Robert settled themselves very cosily in the old library, as they had been used to do before trouble came. Perhaps the chief difference was that they did not yet begin to build air-castles, — lingering rather in the present, occupied with the trifles which made up their lives. If Hannah wantonly sacrificed the words of the hymns she sang nowadays, it was because her present need was satisfied with the giddy evolutions of the fugue tunes to which they were set.

Out of school hours the boys swarmed in and out, full of fun and enthusiasm. It seemed very good to Mrs. Trumbull to hear their happy voices again, and she wondered that they had sometimes tired her before sorrow had set its seal of silence upon her home.

So, each day bringing its full measure of content, the autumn quickly passed and the yearly American festival was at hand. Already the house was redolent with a spicy hint of Hannah's forehandedness. Mince pies galore were in the oven, a fat plum-pudding steamed on the range, and a giant turkey larded and stuffed awaited its funeral pyre.

Robert and his mother had ordered Thanksgiving dinners for Mrs. Beal and her "seven," for John the coachman and his family, for Ellen and her children, for Mrs. Finerty and her boys, — there were some flowers for Danny with this order, — and for the "Home" oranges and nuts enough to keep the doctor busy for a week. Jacky was to dine with Hannah.

Mrs. Trumbull's guests had all accepted, and Robert looked forward to a happy day, — only that Ruth would not be there, though he secretly acknowledged her uncle's right to her at such a time as this.

Robert lay outstretched on the library couch in the pale wintry sunshine, with something like the old smile upon his face. His mother drew

her chair beside him and busied her hands with her knitting. She hoped he would fall asleep, so she did not speak.

"Mother, what is a thank-offering?" he asked presently.

"It is the gift of a grateful heart, dear boy," she answered, a wave of thankfulness filling her own blue eyes with tears. "I should think it could be better expressed as doing something, or giving something, in acknowledgment of some good gift to one's self."

"Well, I should like to make a thank-offering to somebody; shouldn't you?"

"Yes, dear, from the bottom of my heart, I should be glad." After a pause she asked, "Have you thought of anything to do, Robert?"

"N-o-o, not thought, exactly; but I am so happy, mother, and so thankful for lots of things! To have — Mike doing well, — that's one," counting on his fingers; "and — and — so glad we are not going to Europe, — that's two; then I'm thankful to get well, so I can run again sometime like the other fellows."

Mrs. Trumbull bent over her knitting, and Robert went on.

"Mother, do you suppose I can beat Jim Horton, jumping, just as I used to? He'd be glad, I do believe; he's been so nice to me since — since my — accident, you know!"

His mother seemed to be counting, and did not speak.

"Well, mother, what could we do for somebody? I want to help the whole world, some way. Mother dear, you are not listening."

"Yes, my son, your mother hears you. You shall do something for somebody else, and I will help you."

"What can we do?"

"I cannot tell without thinking about it."

"Can't you try to tell?" — with a shade of impatience.

"Have you no plan of your own, Robert?"

"I — I — don't — know." His hesitation did not arise from lack of ideas nor from the means to express them. The fear of disapproval restrained him.

Perhaps in some way his mother associated this unusual reserve with Michele, for she hastened to ask, —

"How should you like to found and endow a kindergarten for poor children?"

"Y-e-s, I should like that; only I want the boys to be as big as Mike, and as little as I." His bright face beamed with expectancy. "May I, mother dear, may I?"

"That is not a kindergarten, dear. Such a school would be very difficult to manage; besides, there is no one to take charge of such a work as that."

"Take charge of it yourself, mother. But I do not want a real school, — only just some nice

place for the fellows to come to, and somebody for them to love, like you."

"One, two, three, four, five," — counted the knitter, bending low over the needles, — "six, seven, eight, —"

"Say, mother, will you ; oh, will you do it?"

"Nine, ten, — I must think about it, dear. We will talk to some one wiser than we, and see what can be done ; but I will promise to help you in some way to do whatever will make you the happiest."

"I don't want to be any happier than I am," fretfully protested the child. "What I want is to make somebody else as happy as I am, because I am happy. I want my happiness to spread."

"You are a dear boy, Robby. We must think about this. It will need a little time before taking the first step ; but we will do something."

As she stooped to caress him, he clung to her tightly, without speaking, and the mother knew how dear to him had been this scheme about which he had kept such long silence. She thought of his father and of his father's dreams of practical philanthropy, and she breathed a prayer for wisdom to guide and shield his child.

The knowledge of the misery and squalor in which Mrs. Finerty lived had been — quite aside from a natural interest in Michele — another of the burdens which Mrs. Trumbull could not drop. She would gladly have done something

for them, but the opportunity never offered ; or, if it had, she had not recognized it. Now, she promised herself not to put it off a single day. That at least would be a sop to quiet her jealous conscience.





CHAPTER XV.

THE THOUGHTS OF YOUTH ARE LONG, LONG
THOUGHTS.

IF the Thanksgiving dinner was satisfactory, it was not wholly owing to its correct appointments, perfect cookery, or comfortable service. The spirit of the day pervaded every heart, and every tongue was glad to acknowledge it.

"I'm so thankful, I can't keep still," Robert confessed, in the first lull in the conversation.

Everybody laughed. If that were to be taken for a sign, when had he not been thankful!

"Well, I am," he reiterated; "and mother is going to let me do something to prove it."

"What, for example?" asked Dr. Alexander.

"That is not quite determined yet," Mrs. Trumbull hastened to interpose.

"I know," said Dr. Williams: "you are going to open a 'gym,' to show the fellows what you can do with a 'store' leg."

"Well, he 's getting warm; — is n't he, mother?"

She nodded, with a restrained smile.

"Then it is to be a—a—a restaurant, Robby," Dr. Herrick suggested, patting the little shoulder next him.

"Warmer yet ! Guess again !"

"Come, put us out of our agony, Bob," pleaded Dr. Williams.

"Not till I have had my guess," Mrs. Herrick objected. "Let me see, — it must be a sewing-school."

"I believe not. You are awfully cold, Mrs. Herrick. Mother, may I tell?"

Mrs. Trumbull hesitated.

"Do you think we are quite sure enough of our own plans?" she asked with an indulgent smile.

"Oh, Bob, don't give the thing away too soon. Better wait till it is patented," cautioned Dr. Williams.

"It is not very definite yet, is it, dear?" the mother coaxed.

"I guess you can trust Robert for planning. You know

" 'A boy's will is the wind's will,
And the thoughts of youth are long, long thoughts,' "

ventured Robert's ally, little Miss Perkins, who had failed to see the drift of Dr. Williams's advice.

Miss Perkins was a neighbor who had no place to give a holiday feast, and no friends to invite to one.

"Well, mother dear, I'll just give them a hint," Robert insisted.

"To pique our curiosity, you know," assented Miss Perkins, unconsciously abetting him.

"Well—we are going to have a sort of—KINDERGARTEN—for big boys who are poor!"

"No! And who are 'we'?" Dr. Herrick asked.

"Oh, all of us," answered Robert, seriously, with a wave of his hands including the entire company.

"When?"

"Very soon, will it not be, mother?"

She looked flushed and *distracte*, but nodded approvingly.

"Where?"

"Now, Dr. Williams, you are laughing; but it truly *is* going to be here,—in this very house, somewhere."

"May I come?"

"Oh, of course! You'll have to come; it is part Miss Ruthy's, anyway."

This time it was the young man's turn to redden, and the others laughed as much as he.

Then, so naturally and simply did the boy talk of his heart's desire, opening up possibilities and seizing material at hand, that the mother

began to wonder how she could have withheld for one moment her hearty co-operation.

It was plainly evident that Robert had long been thinking about it; and, as the scheme developed, every one had some suggestion to make. His idea of a kindergarten for children of a larger growth amounted to little more than a series of simple amusements, — his chief aim being to keep boys out of bad company, as he explained, “and make them want to do right.”

As the company left the table, Ruth and Harold appeared. Robert gave them a rapid account of the conversation. Ruth knew already that he cherished some such darling project, but she had looked a long way into the future for its execution. She cast an anxious glance at Mrs. Trumbull, and was reassured with an answering smile. When they entered the library they were discussing some available place for the beginning.

“Why not use the old North Room?” somebody asked.

“Oh, no! that is too dark,” Robert objected.

“It would do as well as any other at night, and is easily entered from every part of the house,” Ruth argued.

“And we could move the organ in and take up the carpet — ”

“No, indeed,” Robert protested, “I will not have the carpet taken up; I want my friends to see nice things.”

"You did n't let me finish, little spitfire," pursued Dr. Williams. "Take up the carpet and lay down Turkish rugs, — if your mother has any good enough, — and —" He held his arm over his head in an attitude of defence.

"And we shall expect our professors to wear evening dress to match," Ruth bantered in retaliation.

"How are your guests to be invited?" was Dr. Herrick's practical question.

"And who is to choose them?" asked his wife.

"Mike and I are going to pick out some of the very toughest fellows he knows. What fun! I'll bet they'll come!"

Hannah's duties had kept her too busy to linger after dinner was over, though it had cost her a struggle to refrain from taking part in the conversation during the meal. But through the closed doors the insistent strains of the long-metre Doxology arose loud and strong. Hannah was satisfied.

Mrs. Bland had not gone far amiss when she prescribed homes and mothers as an antidote for youthful crime and vagabondage. But what were one home and one small mother among so many boys amenable neither to love nor to conscience!

The accomplishment of the task which Robert had so confidently set himself and his friends has ever been the envy and despair of wise men

and good women. Yet of all the little company who planned and plotted and proposed, he alone suffered no misgivings. Unconscious that he had struck the tap-root of all social reform, he had been quick to perceive that to "make boys happy" must be a first and fundamental endeavor.

"I want them to feel at home," he had said ; and all the arrangements were to be made with that point in view.

It was not long before the big North Room on the ground floor was transformed into a sitting-room. A well-filled book-case and a time-honored mahogany writing-desk properly furnished flanked opposite walls. A shaded lamp occupied the centre of a generous round-table where books and magazines and games lay scattered about. There were good pictures on the freshly tinted yellowish walls. A wide fireplace gave promise of a cheery blaze, and a stout settle was drawn up beside it. Robert himself was forced to confess that the room was vastly improved without the carpet, with its incredible flowers sprangling out of impossible vines ; and he got Hannah to bring down a blue-and-white Japanese rug from his own room to lay before the hearth. Robert wished to move the piano in, but finally compromised on the pipe-organ, which his father used to play, but which had scarcely been opened since Robert's illness.

"Let us give them a regular first-class entertainment, with music and readings, and — another, we are going to have refreshments, are n't we?"

"Oh, no, indeed!" objected Ruth. Robert frowned.

"You'd have to keep it up, if you began," said Dr. Herrick.

Hannah looked up from the long-unused fender that she was polishing.

"'Th' idee o' havin' a pa'cel o' boys a-settin' round the hull evenin', 's hungry 's cubs, 'thout givin' on 'em a bite t' eat!" she exclaimed. "I never! Why, it's ridic'lus."

"Mother, you always give our friends something to eat, when they come here," complained Robert.

"But this is not a party, dear. You know we expect to keep this room open two or three evenings in every week: so we must begin as we expect to continue," Mrs. Trumbull explained.

Robert took no pains to conceal his disappointment.

"I wish I had n't asked them," he said crossly.

"See here, Bob," interposed Dr. Williams, "suppose we compromise. It's your show, you know, and you expect us to run it. Could n't we have a sociable — or —"

"An assembly," amended Harold.

"Yes, 'assembly' is all right, and sounds more interesting — say once a month, with refreshments —"

"Instead of chromos," said Dr. Williams.

"Would you not agree to that?" coaxed Mrs. Herrick.

"Better take it, Robby; 't's better 'n nothin'," Hannah counselled grimly.

Robert yielded his point with rather bad grace; yet he soon entered heartily into the discussion of other arrangements.

"Mis' Trumbull, you 'd orter hev' some posies settin' 'round, with libils hung on 'em; — 'help yerself!' Like 's not they would n't tech one on 'em; but then 'Lead 's not into temptation,' 's good a motto 's any, in my 'pinion."

"You must dress up, too," Robert insisted. "The fellows that are coming, go to the theatre, where people wear beautiful things, and they 'll expect you to look fine." Ruth laughed.

"We shall do our best, Robert," she said. "But you cannot expect us to rival professional beauties."

"And you, too, Mrs. Herrick, and Hannah, — I want every one to look handsome."

"Can they keep that up, Bob, any more than the refreshments, on the salaries you pay?" asked Dr. Williams.

"Oh, we expect to raise their pay before long," answered the boy.

“That depends upon the custom you get, I suppose,” returned the doctor.

So they talked and jested and worked and plotted, — happy in Robert’s pleasure, aside from their own satisfaction in trying to help “lame dogs over stiles.” They found it no sinecure to enlist in Robert’s service, — knowing that every detail must be well thought out ; for, after all, it is the taking of pains beforehand which makes informality natural and agreeable.





CHAPTER XVI.

LABOR THAT PROCEEDETH FROM LOVE.

IF a seed committed to the earth spring up in due time, what matters the process of its germination? The main point is the growth of the living plant from the imprisoned kernel. Robert's desire to make others as happy as himself was already peeping forth, — a sturdy blade after its own kind. There was no organization, no formal opening, no report of the proceedings in the newspapers, no description of costumes ; but one evening the neighbors across the way noticed that Mrs. Trumbull's North Room — unoccupied for many a year — was brightly lighted.

Rain had set in with nightfall, making the crackling fire doubly cheerful. Robert declared it the only thing necessary to insure the appearance of his guests, and to render the cosiness irresistible.

Ruth sat at the organ running over a new book of popular songs, when the first noisy instalment arrived. She afterward confessed that she was too great a coward to stop playing and confront them, so she kept on, which was better.

It was an odd little company, — eight in all, big and little, — headed by Michele, leading Danny, open-mouthed and wide-eyed. And, Michele excepted, it was an unwashed company, — unless Danny be credited with the circle of comparative whiteness described upon his freckled little face, and with a mottled patch on the back of his chubby hands.

“Good-evening,” Mrs. Trumbull said cordially. “Are you wet?” — this in a tone of solicitude.

“Naw,” answered the lad addressed, not returning her salute by so much as the wink of an eyelid.

Turning to another, — “Is it raining still?” she questioned.

“Ya-as,” returned the spokesman, unconcernedly.

Michele had taken off his own cap, and Danny’s. The others kept theirs on, thinking, perhaps, that there was safety in possession.

Robert’s face beamed with pleasure, and Spero barked and jumped with frantic delight.

“So this is Danny,” said Mrs. Herrick, taking his reluctant hand in hers. Spero whined and

sat up by her knee, touching her arm with his paw. "Is n't he a funny dog?" she asked.

"He is, mum," responded Danny, unsmilingly, with a furtive glance at Michele.

"How is granny, to-night?" Mrs. Trumbull inquired, patting his head. Danny was speechless.

"Is granny well?" she persisted.

"Granny's — Moike, kin Oi tell?" he asked, in a loud whisper.

Michele nodded. As if he had pulled a string, the little automaton answered suddenly, —

"Granny's well, mum, thank God!"

Danny had learned the lesson which had cost Michele much pains to teach, — to be seen only.

"Oh, say! here's a rum go!" cried the noisiest boy among them, as he proceeded to enjoy a slide on the smooth and even floor. As nobody interfered or objected, another hastened to follow Leck's example.

"Nar-r-r-do! *Cessa!*" angrily commanded his compatriot; for Nardo Morello was Michele's friend. Immediately he left off sliding, and, shuffling into a seat near the table, shyly peeped into an illustrated magazine.

Meanwhile, the Binckley brothers — aggressive, curious boys, whom nobody could tell apart — were quietly digging a tulip-bulb out of the earth to see how it looked. They quickly put

it back again, however, when they found nothing remarkable at the bottom. Just at that moment Dr. Herrick joined them.

"That bulb looks very much like an onion, does n't it?" he asked; "and yet it has a pretty flower."

"A youngyung 's a darned sight better 'n that thar fool thing," interposed Leck, with a lordly air, having abandoned his amusement to have a finger in this pie.

"'Tain't nuther," contradicted Tip Binckley, fiercely glowering over his shoulder at the interloper.

"That depends upon whether one is fonder of vegetables or flowers," Dr. Herrick interposed, amicably.

"Do you like onions, my boy?" He laid a friendly hand on Leck's shoulder as he spoke.

"Wal, you bet," was the rejoinder, as the lad wriggled away from Dr. Herrick's detaining grasp.

Leck, otherwise Alexander Brown, was an American with an excellent opinion of himself and a corresponding contempt for others. He domineered over his companions up to a certain point; but, like all bullies, he was a coward when resisted.

The dirtiest boy of all—poor patient, pathetic, pinched little crippled Jacky—knew neither his own name nor nationality, though

the card sewn upon his frock when he was left — a puny foundling — upon the steps of the “Children’s Home” declared him to be a Swiss. To him Dr. Herrick turned with yearning pity: —

“Well, sir, I hear them getting ready for a song. Shall we take our seats?”

Jacky hobbled after him with a grateful smile. The concert was already beginning, and there was a scramble for the front row of chairs. Dr. Williams and Harold were singing the “Larboard Watch,” and the boys settled into something like quiet to await the time for the applause, which, to the street-boy, seems to be the chief end of all entertainments.

In response to an *encore*, the singers graciously sang an aria from “Il Trovatore,” which the audience rather generally hummed. For the second *encore*, “Marching Through Georgia” was given. Though the whole company were invited to join in the chorus, the young guests in response only marked the time with their feet. Another *encore*, and the singers bowed low, smiling, and Dr. Herrick began to read “Horatius at the Bridge,” — at first under many difficulties. There was a good deal of talking and an occasional cap was knocked off and a sly kick administered. Still he went on goodnaturedly, and with such spirit that when he reached the passage, —

“On Astur’s throat Horatius
Right firmly pressed his heel,” —

Patrick O’ Toole roared lustily, “Bully for Hoorashayus !” the others loudly cheering.

Pat was the eldest and biggest and sauciest of the party, whose Irish tongue, from the service it did, seemed hung in the middle.

When it was Ruth’s turn to sing, she trembled violently. Scarcely had she finished the first short verse of a ballad about a robin, when coughing and the shuffling of feet compelled her to stop. Then she pulled herself together with an effort, and her tact proved equal to the occasion. In a firm, sweet voice she sang the “Lullaby” from the “Old Homestead,” with such telling effect that Harold whispered, as he leaned over her, “Is the next course handkerchiefs?”

After that, Dr. Herrick read Browning’s “Brave-hearted Gentlemen.” Harold followed, singing “Bonny Dundee,” which nearly brought down the house, — at least Hannah thought the North Room seemed in danger.

The short programme was elastic enough to admit of impromptu variations to suit this exacting little audience. Yet, in the midst of Harold’s best efforts, two German lads — Hans and Gottfried Herrman, stolid, heavy, “strong-limbed and yellow-haired” — bolted unceremoniously from the house.

Robert's delicate cheek grew rosy and Michele's darkened at the interruption, while cries of "Hey!" and "Stop!" mingled with hisses, served to prolong the confusion.

We had forgotten Spero, who was really the star of the evening, — going through his dog-Delsarte in the most approved style, as if it were his own party: sitting up like a soldier; lying down dead; showing his tongue to the doctor; and shaking hands all around.

"We have had a pleasant evening together, have n't we?" Mrs. Trumbull said impersonally, when the clock struck ten. "Now we will sing our good-night hymn together." As she put her knitting aside, Jacky timidly laid a caressing hand on the gay web that was growing under the needles.

Ruth went to the organ, and they — at least all the family — sang : —

"Now the light has gone away ;
Saviour, listen while we pray,
Asking Thee to watch and keep,
And to send us quiet sleep."

Before the last note had died away, nearly all the boys were gone.

It is not in human nature to entertain one's friends and feel no interest in contemplating the achievement. Who is not flattered to hear that his daughter was the very prettiest bride ever

married, that the wedding breakfast was a triumph of culinary skill, that the guests themselves were uncommonly happy? Even sadder episodes which befall the lot of mortals are tempered by the remembrance, when all is over, of orderly rites and kindly consolation. So, when the visitors had gone, the women found pleasant diversion in talking about their venture, making notes of things to avoid in future, and laying plans for the development of an enterprise which gave such good promise.

"Dear old Hannah!" said Mrs. Trumbull, when she and Ruth were alone; "she builded better than she knew when she took her life in her hand, as she afterward confessed, to give me a piece of her mind."

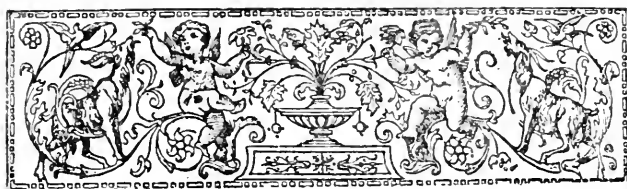
And while the two women consulted together, Hannah was joyfully singing herself away in Watts' memorable hymn, which, however, but faintly expressed her state of mind at that moment.

That night, after she fell asleep, Mrs. Trumbull slept the sleep of peace. If Hannah was wakeful, it was owing to a repeated effort to compute the number of cookies which twenty hearty boys could eat, when her turn should come to provide a feast; for Hannah believed in eating, as a means of grace, — and who shall gainsay her?

Ruth was too happy to sleep; but that did not

prevent her from looking as sweet as a rose the next morning when she joined Mrs. Trumbull and Robert at breakfast. And as for Robert, was he not fulfilling his darling wish? Could mortal boy ask more?





CHAPTER XVII.

SNAGS.

FEW enterprises, however worthy or well-born, are exempt from discouragements. Side-issues develop. Unseen difficulties arise. So it was not long after Mrs. Trumbull and her coadjutors had launched their project before grave obstacles checked its course. The first few nights, it is true, a score or more of lads availed themselves of the hospitality pressed upon them. But, excepting on assembly nights, they seemed rather to submit to the feast of fat things prepared for them than to partake of it with satisfaction. Quick to perceive on the part of their hosts the desire to please and propitiate, the boys behaved so ungraciously that the women more than once secretly regretted their essay in philanthropy.

The boys themselves were suspicious of all friendly overtures. They sneered, they jeered,

they laughed aside darkly, they bullied each other, they sulked, they quarrelled openly, using slang and profanity with unction. It seemed to Mrs. Trumbull that they must be rude and noisy beyond their daily habit. Moreover, — and this was hardest of all to bear, — the number of these degenerate young bears kept decreasing, until, at the end of three months, not more than eight or ten came with any regularity. Even Michele and Danny sometimes stayed away.

On alternate Saturday evenings the programme came to be varied to include an occasional song or recitation by the boys themselves, and refreshment was offered. These were Hannah's happiest occasions. And how greedily her cookies were devoured! She felt well repaid for her trouble, — if anything could be called trouble which was done to please Robert. Perhaps it was in emulation of his friends that he once whispered in her ear, —

“I wish I were an idol with ever so many mouths to eat cookies, and hands enough to feed the mouths!”

But, for the women who had set for themselves so brave a task, the boys' indifference was a bitter disappointment. That their own theory was well-grounded there could be no question. Clearly they were only hampered by the method of its application.

It was but natural that Mrs. Trumbull shrank

from admitting even to herself the failure that seemed imminent; and Ruth dissembled her fears, laying the mistakes at her own door. Hannah and Robert found it easier to break down the barrier of reserve, and talked it over together, with freedom at least.

"Mebby they 're attackted with growin' pains, an' feel cross," she apologized. Or, — ready to charge herself with blame, — "P'rhaps them poor little fellers ain't use't ter much sweetnin'; an' my cookies ain't plain, not by a hornspoonful." Robert was afraid their entertainments were not exciting enough for boys who bet and gambled and quarrelled their evenings away. No matter what the cause had been, certain failure stared them in the face.

At last, without consulting Mrs. Trumbull, Ruth set out one day, thinking it possible to find a clew to the situation in the neighborhood where the boys lived. As she passed the rectory, a smart shower came on suddenly. Instinctively she ran up the steps for shelter.

"Come in, come in!" said the rector, cheerily, as he opened the door for her. "Spring flowers need rain as well as sunshine. A little adversity does us good."

"In that case, Dr. Herrick, I shall soon be very good," Ruth answered ruefully, though she had meant to be gay.

"Dear, dear! I hope nothing has happened."

"N-o, nothing has — happened," she said soberly; "that is, nothing new." Seating herself as she spoke, she seemed lost in watching the rain as it softly pattered down. She looked so sorrowful that the old man began to feel alarmed.

"What can be the matter, dear child?" he coaxed.

"Shall I interrupt you? If not, I am glad of the accident which gives me the opportunity to tell you."

"You should not have waited for chance to give you the opportunity of asking help of your mother's friend, Ruthy," he chided.

"Well, then, I am unhappy."

"You, Ruthy! You unhappy? I cannot imagine it. Why, my dear, you are the very soul of cheerfulness."

"I have tried to do my best. I have done honestly what I could — to —"

"That is certainly orthodox treatment for mental dyspepsia," encouraged the rector.

"Oh, Dr. Herrick, I am afraid Mrs. Trumbull's scheme will come to nothing; and I am heart-sick!" Her tears began to fall.

"Oh, no, not so bad as that! Do you know where the trouble lies?" he asked.

"No; and that is the worst of it. I only know that we are on the wrong track, some way. Mrs. Trumbull gives herself no time for the social

life which she so heartily enjoys. She spends generously to carry out her plan. But the boys do not appreciate what has cost her so much self-sacrifice. We use all our tact to tempt them to her house ; then we exhaust ourselves, mind and body, to entertain them after they are caught."

"Oh, my dear, there is a vulnerable point in your premises. You are looking for appreciation—which is but another name for pay—for what you appear to offer gratuitously. Why do you expect appreciation? Gratitude is one of the ear-marks of civilization. Your boys aren't up to it yet. You are all doing your duty to your neighbor, as it is defined by God's law. Can you not trust Him for the result?"

"I cannot rise above our present failure, after all Mrs. Trumbull's courageous effort ; and then, Robert will be so disappointed," Ruth complained.

"That is not your part, my child. Has God set any limit to His love and patience? Has He given you a task beyond your strength? Trust Him to further your work, if it be done in His name. Do it in an honest, self-respecting way. Your aim is worthy. Be sure He will prosper you in His own good time."

"But we are making a mistake somewhere," said Ruth. "We are missing the main point."

"Is it not too soon to know that?" persisted the rector.

"I am sure of it."

"How?"

"That I cannot discover. The street-boy is much harder to amuse than other children."

"Amuse? Is n't that because street-boys are obliged to be so practically in earnest that it seems like pretending?" suggested Dr. Herrick. "They know only the serious side of life, and perhaps they are secretly ashamed to be amused. Besides, they always wish to know why everything is done, and they cannot fathom your motive."

"I never thought of that," she replied.

"Why not set them at work?"

"That has occurred to me; but nothing tangible has suggested itself."

"What does Mrs. Trumbull think? Could n't Harold put you in the way of giving the boys some practical instruction in the line of the trades, for example? or, Mrs. Herrick, — perhaps she could help you; but she is not at home this morning."

Ruth brightened. "Your idea is worth cultivating," she said, as she rose to go. "I thank you heartily, and do please ask Mrs. Herrick to think about it, too."

"Look at the blue sky now, my dear. It could not rain always. The clouds make the sunshine all the brighter. Keep up good courage. Be honest with yourself; go to bed early; eat heartily; sing all you can; pray as if you were

asking a rational being for a reasonable thing, and expected to get it. It will all come out right if you only learn to wait, as well as to labor. Good-bye !”

Ruth ran down the rectory steps, to encounter Dr. Williams, who was passing in his new phaeton. He stopped.

“Were you going to Mrs. Trumbull’s,” he asked, springing down lightly.

“Yes,” she answered, with a little shamefaced avoidance of the young man’s glance ; for she feared the tell-tale traces of late tears.

“Then let me drive you over,” he said, cramping the wheel to assist her. “You never have a minute of recreation. Shall we take the longest way, by the park? You need it, Ruth, and the drive will refresh you.”

“I am afraid I should be shirking duty,” she answered, laughing ; “but a drive would be very pleasant, this sweet soft day. It seems like April.”

“Never mind shirking. That will be a new practice, which, as a medical man, I strongly recommend. So I shall administer my own prescription on the spot.”

“Well, I ’il excuse the breach of professional etiquette, and accept offered advice with pleasure,” — stepping into the phaeton. “Am I your first patient?” She certainly did not look ill.

“Do you intend to reflect upon my age and experience?”

"Oh, no ; I was only thinking how proudly I should boast of that honor when you wake up and find yourself famous, some fine day. Does Dr. Herrick swallow his nephew's prescriptions? "

"On the contrary, the fact that he is a physician's uncle seems to have the effect of making drugs superfluous."

"What a misfortune if the whole town should respond in a similar way to your influence ! "

A sudden reaction had made Ruth gay. As the young man glanced down at her animated face, he could not but wonder why she had been crying, as beyond question she had. In a straightforward way he undertook to discover the reason.

"I hope you are not overworking at Mrs. Trumbull's," he said. "Is anything wrong up there? "

"Wrong?" she evaded.

"Why, yes, Ruth ; you looked like the chief mourner at an English funeral, when I first saw you to-day. I thought uncle had been scolding you."

"No, indeed ! On the contrary, he had been petting me a good deal."

"You need not go away from home to get that, I should think," he answered, smiling. "Robert says you are the 'best girl' of every fellow there."

"Dr. Williams, do you think it possible that

we are taking the wrong course to reach our end?" Ruth asked irrelevantly.

"In the first place, why do you begin to call me 'Dr. Williams,' when you and I have been 'Ruth' and 'John,' lo! these many years?"

"I don't know," — faintly.

"I am sure I do not. Then cease to do evil, and learn to do well, from this time henceforth."

"Well, what about our methods?" she persisted.

"Why, to tell the truth, I am not quite up in them. Please tell me what you do when it is not show-night, and how you do it; and I'll give you an unbiased opinion, regardless of consequences."

"Please do not laugh at me, John; I am in earnest, and in real perplexity, too. Will you not stop joking long enough to help me?"

"Yes, Ruthy, I'll sober down now. I shall be only too glad if you will really let me do something to lighten your burdens. What is the matter?"

"I don't know. Sometimes I think we are too anxious to begin reforming," she said.

"And the fellows themselves know it, too?" he asked.

"Yes. Besides, your uncle thinks we may be entertaining them too much."

"There is something in that, — a good deal of human nature, at least," he said. "Why

not make them entertain themselves, — and you?"

"*Par exemple*, how?" asked the girl, eagerly.

"Why not impress some shoemaker? His services would be to the point, I should think. Or Mr. Blunt, the carpenter? He could teach the boys how to drive a nail to some purpose."

"Capital!" exclaimed the girl. "Why, John, you are a real conjurer. Do you suppose those men could afford to give us so much time?"

"At all events, Ruth, I am glad if any suggestion of mine will drive away dull care from your face. If I did not suppose you would scorn interference, I should propose to see them for you."

"I see it is war to the knife, John. But I'll grant you a truce, if you will really help us," she said, laughing, as she gave him her hand at parting. "And, by the way, do you not think Mr. Holmes would be willing to give the boys some instruction in drawing?"

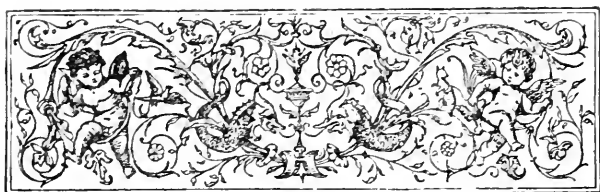
"Of course he would. But, Ruthy, do you imagine there is any latent Michael Angelo among them?" he replied.

"There is one boy, certainly, with a similar name, and some talent too," she insisted. "Still, that is an after consideration. But, John, I wish you would come in to-morrow evening, with Harold, to look over our material and our possibilities. You have given us up altogether."

“That is because — well, Ruth, to tell the truth, I thought you did not need me.”

“And I suppose your arduous duties occupy all your time,” teased the girl, avoiding his eyes.





CHAPTER XVIII.

WHAT THE WALLS HEARD.



HAT evening as the two women lingered over their coffee Ruth broached the subject so near their hearts. Up to this time neither had admitted to the other that defeat was impending; and even now Ruth would have walked long in the valley of humiliation without a murmur, had she not believed herself able to tread the highway of prosperity. So she began by confessing her own disappointment in the same breath with the remedy which she wished to suggest.

"We ought to have better audiences, with such high-class performances," she said cheerily. Mrs. Trumbull only sighed.

"I think the boys would be far happier if they were made to depend more upon themselves for entertainment, instead of expecting us to amuse them," Ruth went on. "They are not used to

being deferred to and petted, and they are undoubtedly suspicious of us. They see no reason for our interest in them. It is a waste of raw material just to amuse them, and to do nothing else."

"Jewel in a swine's snout!" commented Hannah.

"Surely, you would not give up the experiment!" exclaimed Mrs. Trumbull.

"Oh, no, indeed! But we might vary our programme, to the boys' advantage, as well as to our own satisfaction."

"Have you any plan in your own mind, dear?"

"Well, I confess it is not well enough arranged to be called really a plan; yet I have had a lurking desire to introduce useful occupations, — a sort of 'grown-up kindergarten,' Robert's primary idea, — which would interest as well as instruct them."

Mrs. Trumbull looked relieved. "I am sure anybody would be glad to help us," she said. "You know Dr. Herrick has already offered to teach any of the boys, if they will only be taught."

"He!" Ruth exclaimed, blushing. "When did he offer? I did not know it. Why, I saw him to-day, and talked with him about our evenings with the boys, and he never said a word about it."

"Perhaps he thought we had decided not to

accept his assistance. To tell the truth, when he proposed it, I thought him rather visionary."

"Satan finds some mischief still for idle hands to do," said Hannah, from the recesses of the china-closet.

"You are right, Hannah," Mrs. Trumbull coincided.

"It has always seemed to me that in teaching a boy, his natural bent should be discovered and encouraged," Ruth pursued. "Of course this holds good in the treatment of the very poor, and in this case it might go far to solve our problem."

"Yes, indeed," said Mrs. Trumbull; "many a good farmer has been wasted behind a counter, while physicians and lawyers and ministers fail of success who might have been prosperous business men."

"Them ain't the only folks 't 's cut out by the wrong pattern," Hannah supplemented.

"There are ever so many things that could be taught, if we only had the right place," Ruth went on, with a smile of recognition for Hannah. "We might easily get men to come in and teach the boys, if we had a carpenter's bench and the tools to work with."

"That is a bright idea! Why not set up a carpenter's bench? There is room enough for that and Mr. Holmes's easel. The boys who want to read can go into the library, and Dr.

Herrick is welcome to the dining-room, if he can persuade anybody to be taught by him."

"The suggestion of occupations is not original with me," answered Ruth, with a little embarrassment. "John Williams proposed it, and thought Mr. Blunt could help us, if he would."

"Poor Mr. Blunt is so crowded to the wall by manufactories, which do the same work more cheaply than he, that I think he would be glad to come, for a consideration; and we can well afford to pay him for his services."

"That would be kind. With him to teach, we should have the advantage of his general knowledge and experience in the carpenter's trade; whereas nowadays, uncle says, a man usually works at but one branch of any trade. Then perhaps we might, later on, introduce a shoemaker's bench. That also was John's suggestion." Ruth determined to relieve her conscience at one sitting.

"Shoemaker? Why, poor Stark, who made shoes for the oldest inhabitant, is still shoeing their children's children, to the third generation. We might enlist him."

"Do you mean it?" cried Ruth, joyfully. "Why, our fortune is made!"

Then, with an occasional aside, — in which Hannah bore a leading part, — they discussed new measures, too happy to notice that the clock had struck twelve.

It was not long before the idea — at first so vague and glimmering — began to take tangible shape. Under Mr. Blunt's supervision the North Room was transformed into a real workshop. Carpenter's bench, saws, planes, chisels, hammers, boards, looked as if they had always belonged there. The lads who first peeped in that night found the "boss" in his leather apron busy at work in a very real way, which completely disarmed caution. They did not need a second hint to pass him the tool he wanted, or to lend a hand in various other ways. Robert loved to watch, rather than to imitate, the carpenter; but the boy was ready to give unfeigned praise to any other fellow whose talent lay in that direction.

Perhaps Tom Blunt, Junior, was also an attraction, whistling and chatting so merrily; for, before the end of the first week, the carpenter's bench could not afford room nor tools for all the little hands that were eager for employment. Indeed, Dr. Herrick felt that to attempt to form a study class at such a time would be worse than folly; so he often laid aside his frock-coat, and, tying on one of Hannah's big aprons, pleased himself with the fiction of being a boy, as he hewed and hammered and sawed with the others. He and Thomas Blunt were the best of friends; besides, in his youth Dr. Herrick himself had discovered a knack for tinkering. His wife still shows with pride a pretty work-

table which he made to furnish their first rectory. As they all worked together, night after night, the old man seemed to get very near the hearts of the rough boys ; and, when once they had lost their self-consciousness, the conversation flowed on without restraint.

“ Do you know that the Boy Jesus was a carpenter ? ” the rector once asked, of a lad who was evidently enjoying the piece of work on which they were engaged together, under the direction of Mr. Blunt.

“ No ! ” exclaimed the boy, looking up in surprise.

“ Yes, and what is more, He was willing to be taught and directed, as you are, working as we are working.” Others drew a little nearer to listen. “ The Bible says He was ‘ subject to His parents ’ ; which means, you know, that He obeyed them. Jesus was poor, and His friends were poor. All His friends worked for a living.”

“ Were they all carpenters ? ” one asked.

“ Oh, no ! Some were fishermen, some were tent-makers, some were tanners ; but all were in earnest, as you are. Another time I will tell you more about the Lord Jesus Christ, if you would like to hear about Him.”

“ Bully for you ! ” cried Leck.

“ T’morrer ? ” asked Jacky ; and the promise was readily given. Dr. Herrick always stopped while there was more to tell.

At another time he had been talking about the lad whose five loaves and few small fishes were made to feed five thousand people. He dwelt on the fact that this unknown boy was made of use, because he was ready to serve.

"Wot was dat kid's name?" inquired Leck.

"Ah! that we do not know, my boy. Jesus cares for the children themselves, not for their names."

"D'ye s'pose little Jesus ever got tired?" asked Jacky, whose pitiful deformity hinted at weariness.

"He knoweth all our infirmities," reverently replied Mr. Blunt.

"Yes, Jacky, yes," said the rector, "He doubtless got tired; for He took our nature upon Him, you know, when He was born a helpless baby."

"And cut hisself, sometimes, I'll bet," supplemented a fellow with a tell-tale rag around his dingy finger.

"Well, I'll bet He did n't play baby 'bout it, 'f he did," retorted Billy Binckley.

"Dry up! Tommy ain't snivellin', nuther," interfered the wounded boy's big brother, with a swagger that silenced criticism. "Yer cheekier 'n a mule!" he growled.

"The little Carpenter we were talking about was called the 'gentle Jesus,'" Dr. Herrick significantly interposed. "He tried never to hurt anybody's feelings."

To relieve congestion in the carpenter's shop, another bench, after a while, was set up in the North Room, where John Stark was duly installed with his lasts and awl. Nor did he lack volunteer apprentices in the business which must appeal to boys who are too often obliged to wear foot-gear that only by courtesy can be called "shoes." Mr. Stark found many who were willing to pound and peg, stretching the wet, odorous leather over the lasts, but who drew the line at sewing. That was "girls' work," they said, until Robert undertook to learn it.

"Ye might jest 's well say it's a boy's biz'niz to 'arn yer own livin'; an' how many fellers live on their ma's, 'thout feelin' 't all squeamish 'bout it!" remonstrated the cobbler, impatient of the folly of youth.

As Ruth had predicted, the experiment of introducing useful and natural occupation had its effect. The number of boys increased, until, at last, it was a question what to do with them. Moreover, there was less of discontent and misconduct.

Meantime, Mr. Holmes had undertaken to teach a class in drawing, which, by the natural law of the survival of the fittest, was soon reduced to three members. He did, however, give rudimentary lessons in architecture to Nardo, who preferred mathematical accuracy to the responsibility of imitation pure and simple. Nardo,

who in point of discernment was a degree in advance of his fellows, had already begun to respond to the gentle influences which had come into his life; and, here let it be recorded, they all seemed to have climbed a round in that virtue which is next to godliness, and often leads the way to it. Signs of higher civilization were daily growing apparent, though it must be owned there was still much to wish for. Dr. Herrick and Harold taught classes in arithmetic and physical geography on alternate evenings, and a writing-class was formed,—but that did not thrive.

All this time the strange attachment between Robert and Michele had been steadily increasing in strength. And, in spite of repeated lapses from truth; in spite of the missing letter; in spite of a talent for mischief which could out-puck Puck himself,—the boy in the main had so well borne himself as to win the confidence (affection indeed), not only of Mrs. Trumbull's friends, but of Mrs. Trumbull herself. And yet perhaps not one among them all—unless it were Ruth—recognized the fact that then to have eliminated Michele from their equation would have been to lose the key to its interpretation. And he? Unconsciously making for himself a place, he was also trying unconsciously, to live up to the new standard. Robert's happiness was indeed "spreading." Even little Danny had

come within its radius, — his broad, sunny face growing broader and sunnier with every day.

“What are you going to be, Michele?” asked Mrs. Herrick, one evening, as she seated herself beside the lad, who was drawing at a table a little apart from the others. “Shall you be an artist?” she continued encouragingly.

“Me, I-a don’ know.”

“Oh, yes, you do, Michele! Surely you must have thought of something which you would like to do when you are a man.”

“Oh, yas!”

“What, then?” she persisted.

“I-a no, can — never, — I don’ know.”

“Come, dear, tell me. You must not say ‘cannot.’ You will not make a good painter or anything else if you say that. What would you like to do if you were able?”

Mrs. Herrick was mechanically turning the leaves of a book of engravings as they talked, and as the thought struck her, she asked, —

“Would you not like to be an engraver? How fine it would be to make pictures like these!”

“Oh, yas, me, I-a like eet ver’ well.” Michele’s dark face was suddenly illumined like a lighted lantern.

“Well, why not? You would work hard to learn, would n’t you, if you had a chance?”

“Yas, work-a hard, — ver’ hard.” He smiled

brilliantly ; but Mrs. Herrick knew that his standard of hard work and her own were quite different.

“Then we shall see what we can do,” she said, as she laid her hand on his rough black head with a tender motherly touch. “Be a good boy, Michele, and never even think ‘I can’t,’ if you wish to be a great painter. You can be, if you try.”

Michele never forgot that evening. The inspiration and the gentle hand were somehow mixed, inextricably, and there was no need to separate them.

Every night, after the evening hymn was sung, — always the same one, that it might become familiar, and thus beloved, — at a signal, Harold took his hat, and, bowing to the ladies, went out quietly. They all had hoped — though some accessions to their ranks must have been a trial to their faith — that by keeping in sight the manners of a gentleman, the boys might be constrained to copy them. Some of the boys indeed had noticed a new code of behavior, and if they were not yet prepared to adopt it, even the knowledge of it must have had its influence upon them. It was a step upward to recognize a difference. To reach the top was not impossible, and Ruth was learning to wait.



CHAPTER XIX.

A NUMBER OF THINGS.

“**W**ELL, mother, I’ve been to see Mr. Hornblower about Mrs. Finerty, and I think he is awfully funny!”

“Robert!” — breathlessly.

“Yes; why not, mother? You all said he did not pay her enough to keep soul and body together, and that was the reason why she —”

“Robert Trumbull! you don’t mean to say —”

Harold interrupted his sister. “See here, Robby, go on. Just tell us all about it.”

“Why, I only just went to Mr. Hornblower’s store and asked for him. I suppose he thought I wanted a new suit, for he patted my shoulders and asked how my mother was. I told him; then I said I’d come on business — that I had heard how hard Mrs. Finerty worked for his ‘sweat-shop,’ and I asked him if he could n’t give her more pay.”

“What did he say?” — resignedly.

“He looked surprised at first ; then he threw his head back and laughed. He’s got false teeth, for I saw them, — just like Dr. Alex — ”

“Did n’t he say anything?” interposed Ruth, hastily.

“Yes, he asked where I got my information ; and I told him you all said he starved his work-people. Then he stopped laughing and sat down at his desk. I liked him much better then. But he looked awfully sober when he began to write. After a while he gave me this letter. ‘Take that to our “sweat-shop,”’ he said, and laughed again. I hate to be laughed at and I felt cross ; but I did n’t say anything, and he stopped. Then he told me to take this letter down to Carter Street, — you know where it is, Miss Ruthy ; but I could n’t go without asking, so I came home. May I go now, mother?”

Mrs. Trumbull drew a deep breath. “What did Mr. Hornblower say about the letter?” she asked.

“Oh, nothing, — only he asked me how to spell Finerty, and I knew how.”

“I hope he has not discharged her,” said Dr. Williams.

“I’ll ask.”

“No, no, dear ; do not do anything more. You should have spoken about going, before taking so much responsibility,” his mother reproved.

"I was afraid you would n't let me go," he confessed frankly.

"I'm going that way by and by, Bob, and I'll drive you down," Dr. Williams said, pulling the ends of his mustache.

"I wish we could arrange in some way to provide a better home for Michele," Ruth said. "It is a shame that he must live in such filth and wretchedness."

"Yet he will not leave Mrs. Finerty?" questioned some one.

"Leave her! I should think not."

"Then why not take the dilemma by both horns, — renovate the place, and reform the woman?"

"Try it. Nothing is easier than to renovate the place, but how about the party of the second part?"

"Is it too late to reform her?"

"She reforms herself, far too often and too easily," Harold answered.

"Yes, that is the trouble," sighed Ruth.

"Then Michele and Danny should be removed to a more wholesome atmosphere, with or without her consent or theirs," Dr. Williams declared.

"No, I do not agree with you," returned Ruth. "Danny is her own boy, and Michele would die, sooner than desert her."

"Well, what then?"

"Who knows?" said Mrs. Trumbull. "We

have paid a strong woman to clean her premises more than once. Mrs. Finerty is old and lame, and — ”

“Cheerful,” added Harold.

“Yes, she is content to let things go on. It is no wonder that her home is ‘mussy,’ as Hannah says. She works hard for starvation pay, and a few cents’ worth of whiskey goes farther to cheer her than the same amount spent in food — and does not need to be cooked. One needs courage to keep clean under such circumstances. Then Mrs. O’Hara is always ready to share her ‘bit dhrap,’ whether it is her neighbors’ or her own.”

“These boys ought not to be brought up by a drinking woman,” Dr. Williams pursued.

“N—no — but — ”

“But what, Ruth? You certainly cannot mean to let things take their course ! ”

“I do not know what I mean. To separate them forcibly would be fatal to Mrs. Finerty’s chance of reformation, and the boys would rebel.”

“Have you ever remonstrated with the woman? ”

“Have n’t we ! ” laughed Ruth.

“We have done more than that,” said Mrs. Trumbull. “I have bribed her, reasoned with her, coaxed her, appealed to her love for her dead daughter and her child.”

"And I have plainly told her that the 'Humane Society' will interfere, unless she mends her ways," said Ruth.

"With what result?"

"She calls me 'darlint,' and assures me that it is her solemn 'intintions' never to taste another drop of liquor."

"Ruth can't resist the old woman when she tells her that she is the 'shpakin' image uv me poor gurr!," teased Harold.

"Isn't that flattering enough to turn my head?" she asked. "Poor Mike is as loyal as the sun. He refuses to discuss her weakness; and Danny does not dare to open his mouth to report it, unless Michele gives him leave, — which is not often."

"How did you find this out?" Dr. Williams asked.

"Oh, Harold and I went there one night, some time ago, to look up the boys, who had missed coming here two evenings in succession. Such a din you never heard. We knocked, then waited a long time, when Danny cautiously opened the door, — just a crack, and peeped out."

"'What is the matter?' we asked.

"'Granny's dhrrunk, mum,' the poor little fellow answered in a loud whisper."

"Poor baby!" sighed Mrs. Herrick, who had just come in with Mary Allen.

"Michele did not take that view of it," Ruth answered. "He sprang forward with the frown of an avenging angel, and seizing Danny's shoulder, hurled him aside.

"'Granny ees-a ver' seek,' Michele whispered.

"'May we come in?' I asked.

"'Oh, no! She ees-a slip pritty queek.' We respected the boy's pride, and came away."

"You have no idea what a terrible neighborhood that is at night," Harold said. "There is no artistic beauty to me in tottering houses and filthy rags, where vice and want are rampant. One could almost believe the wretched creatures inspired by a sort of *esprit de corps*, each doing his best to keep up a reputation for wickedness. Oaths, screams, laughter, and cries of pain mingled in sickening clamor. Cruel sights and evil smells hold high carnival in Arrow Place and its vicinity."

"And yet our boys live and move and have their being in the very heart of that district," said Ruth.

"Their homes are not all so wretched, are they?" asked Mary Allen, who had only lately offered her services in behalf of social persuasion.

"Oh, no; and there must be some right way to make the worst better," Ruth answered cheerily. "I do not yet despair of Mrs. Finerty."

"Ruthy is leaning toward a 'settlement' among them, — that is easy to see," sighed Dr. Williams.

“No, because that is not practicable. I am going straight on, one day at a time; and in that sweet ‘some time’ when we shall all inhabit our own air-castles, even the ‘settlement’ may come to pass.”

From first to last Mrs. Trumbull had kept her resolution to hold Sunday sacred to her own family. The North Room was shut, all traces of the boys and their work were put out of sight, and she and Robert spent that day in each other’s society,—in church and out of it.

Late in the afternoon of a chilly Sunday in the early spring, they were all gathered in the library where they loved to be,—Ruth at the piano, and Robert with his violin,—when he espied Michele and Danny crouching in a clump of lilacs under the window.

“Oh, ask them in, mother dear; please do!” he entreated. “Mike loves music so, and Sundays are horrid down in Arrow Place.”

What could any mother do then but open her door and bid them welcome, even though it cost a pang? She knew that this was the beginning of the end of her jealously guarded privacy, which Michele had respected without so much as a hint to do so.

Well, by and by it turned out that every Sunday afternoon the boys who chose came to sing. Then Hannah felt that her cup of happiness could hold very few drops more. Even

though she was unable to join in the modern music which they sometimes sang, she declared that it did not hinder her from singing in spirit.

Sometimes, too, Dr. Herrick, sitting among the boys, talked with them rather than to them, in the pauses between the hymns. What sermons those were, — pointed by the daily life of the preacher, — only they were not sermons at all ! Of all who heard him, none ever forgot that he loved the sinner whose sin he hated. Even the Lord's Prayer, repeated at first by many a reluctant lip, came at last to be the natural ending to a happy Sunday. If Ruth hesitated to suggest a Sunday-school, it was because she had not thought it possible without imposing too much upon her friends. So, in the hope that it was not far off, she wrote it down on the long list of good things to work and wait for until "some time" should open the way.

And yet, disguise the fact as she would, despite their many new devices, Ruth could not cheat herself with the belief that Robert's venture had been thoroughly successful. True, a good many boys had found their way to Mrs. Trumbull's house from time to time ; but, except for a scant dozen, — including Michele and Danny and Nardo and Jacky, — none could be counted upon as loyal supporters of the enterprise.

Moreover, while the two friends were no longer strangers to the region of Arrow Place, they did not inhale its atmosphere with the zest of the native, — and the native knew it. If Mrs. Finerty had learned to bear their efforts in her behalf with a show of patience, it is but fair to confess that she and her friend Mrs. O'Hara consoled themselves with many a bumper to the good old times before she had been discovered. And if one poor soul welcomed the women's friendly visits without an eye to substantial benefits, this was not yet apparent.

That Ruth had theories, it cannot be denied, — girls sometimes have, — and the very first principle which by precept and practice she had tried to teach was unselfishness pure and simple, — though John Williams went so far as to hint rather broadly that the whole superstructure of her theory was built upon a basis essentially selfish. "To give up a darling wish for the sake of others" was a gospel as incomprehensible and unpleasant to the little human cormorants who could conceive of giving up nothing except by force, as it was to John.

With the advancing summer it became evident that something must be done, so they retreated. In short, for very lack of use, the carpenter shop was shut. The shoemaker took a rest, and lessons were suspended. A vacation

was declared. But when Ruth took time to study the map of the new country which she had undertaken to conquer, she marked many a battle-field, — some lost, some won, — and she found her picket-lines far advanced, though she had been given few hostages.





CHAPTER XX.

KNOWLEDGE COMES, BUT WISDOM LINGERS.



UTH was cast down but not destroyed. There must be some right way to do the "thing she longed for so," she told herself, and she must find that way. To her coadjutors the vacation foreshadowed the relinquishment of all further attempt to allure the children of the slums to more wholesome haunts. To Ruth the hope was simply deferred; yet she was far from being sick at heart. Neither was Robert discouraged, but set about making new plans to be put into operation when he and his mother should return in the autumn from their long-postponed European trip. And Ruth would not suffer his happiness to be clouded by the expression of her own misgivings.

"I cannot think that the strong desire to help these people was implanted in me without some means to accomplish it," she said, one of the last evenings before Mrs. Trumbull was to sail.

"The one thing needful seems to be the corresponding desire on the part of 'these people,'" bantered Dr. Williams, with secret satisfaction that it was so.

"If they will not come here to get cheese-cakes, I will go to their own quarter with plain bread."

"Not a 'settlement'!" Mrs. Trumbull exclaimed.

"Why not go out to India as a missionary, and have it over?" John looked positively miserable.

"Oh, no! not a settlement nor a foreign mission, thank you!" Ruth answered, laughing. "But I am certainly going to try — something —"

"I think Ruthy is on the right track, after all," said Dr. Herrick. "We might as well focus our minds on the fact that these fellows hate to be reformed. It is not natural that the children of the slums should come up here to furnish a medium for the exercise of amateur philanthropy."

"Yes, I know that," answered Ruth, thoughtfully. Mrs. Trumbull sighed.

"Well, what about going to Mahomet, if he refuses to come to the mountain?" suggested Harold.

"We have no assurance of gaining our end even in that way," Mrs. Trumbull objected.

"Oh, no! but isn't it worth the trying? The slum must possess some charm of its own to hold captive its inhabitants."

"Far otherwise, Ruth ; they feel like captives here. It is liberty that they want, and is n't this the country to get it in?" Dr. Alexander had come in with Robert, and was not slow to master the difficulty.

"I am going to look about a little," she pursued. "There must be some place where one or two rooms could be secured, for a small consideration, in which the boys would feel at home."

"That's just what I wanted, Miss Ruthy, when we first began," Robert said. "I can't see why they were not happy here ; but they were not, — except Mike and Danny and Jacky. Even Nardo does n't like this part of the town." Robert's young eyes were not peering into corners for ghosts of failures to frighten him. He was burdened with responsibility for the misery of other boys, and like a brave little knight-errant he buckled on his armor fearlessly. God bless him !

"You have n't been looking at Jimmy McFadden's old saloon, I suppose," chaffed John.

"Yes, I inquired about that ; but it is rather expensive for our purpose."

"See here, Ruth : if you'll promise to keep out of such places till I find the time, I'll look up something for you among my 'constituents,' where I certainly ought to feel at home." John was not joking now.

"Where has Jimmy McFadden gone, then?" Robert asked anxiously.

"Up town somewhere," returned the young man.

"Well, I'm pretty glad of that!" Robert's eyes were shining. "He always trusts Mrs. Finerty for whiskey, and she can't get any more now. Hooray!"

"Good!" cried Dr. Alexander, patting the boy's shoulder. "We ought to take McFadden's saloon to keep some other out. Eh, Robert?"

"You could not do anything this summer, could you, Ruth, if you had a place to start in?" asked Mrs. Trumbull.

"Oh yes, indeed! I'd make it so pleasant and orderly and cool, that every fellow who knew of it would want to come in out of the hot, noisy street. Would not that be something gained?"

"But you could not go there alone," objected Mrs. Herrick.

"Oh, no! Would n't you and Hannah mother me?"

"How I wish we could move right down there this minute!" urged Robert, hopping about like a snared bird, as he always did when he was impatient.

"Well, I have a substitute to offer, provided Robert approves of it," said Mrs. Trumbull.

She drew him closer to her, as she asked:

"How should you like to take the old house on Tinkham Street for that purpose, Robert?"

"Oh, mother, mother dear!" exclaimed the boy, stealing an arm around her neck, his own bright face against hers. "How good you are!"

"It has just become vacant for the first time in years. I am sure it is the very place you are looking for," she said. "Robert is fond of it because his mother was born there; and, as he wishes it, there is no reason why you should not take possession as soon as it can be put in order."

Ruth could not speak.

"That comes of having a fairy godmother," said Harold.

"Isn't she a dear!" exulted Robert, kissing her cheek.

"To think of the possibilities of a whole house of our very own!" at last Ruth found voice to say.

"There goes Ruth again, after her settlement!" complained Dr. Williams. "How could you put such a temptation in her way, Mrs. Trumbull?"

Ruth looked at him straight out of her clear gray eyes as she answered, soberly, —

"That may be the vocation unto which it shall please God to call me, John."

"Not if the prayers of a sinner can avail to avert that calamity," he returned under his breath, — which was quite unnecessary, for the others were all talking at once.

"You do not need to be told that the chief

distinction of Tinkham Street is the number of children of every size and hue and race who swarm there, night and day," Mrs. Trumbull resumed. "The house was once pleasant and comfortable, but it has seen many vicissitudes."

It was more than Hannah could do to hold her peace at this.

"Sh'd think it orter be good 'nough for ennybody," she jealously interposed. "I never! Sh'd like to live there m'self. It done fer Mis' Trumbull's folks b'fore she was born, an' 't ain't a mite hurt, — not 's I can see. 'T would seem a sight more t' hum 'n ennywheres else 't I know of." Tender memories of her youth were written in the old woman's face, like the names and dates of a faded sampler.

"Hannah is faithful to old friends," her mistress said, with an indulgent smile. "This is a roomy old two-story brick house, with a fine colonial doorway which was my mother's pride," she went on. "In the rear is a stable, with a small grass-plot between it and the house, — or what was once a grass-plot and may be made one again. The ceilings are high enough, the woodwork dark, and the windows large. With freshly tinted walls, some new furniture, and plenty of chairs, it will be comfortable."

Then followed a confusion of voices in eager question and answer, Robert's high treble often prominent and insistent.

"How glad I am, mother dear!" he said, when the preliminaries were settled. "Only think how my being happy has spread! It has kept going on and on, and I am happier all the time." She took his face between her hands and turned it up, — her own almost transfigured. "I thank you ever and ever so much," he said, with another hug.

"It is not your mother who has given you this happiness, dear," she said.

"Well, I thank them all, and I love them all, too, — and the boys."

"Hold on, Bob! You aren't done with us yet. Don't express yourself hastily," counselled Dr. Williams.

"Here comes Mr. Holmes!" and Ruth opened the door for him.

"You do not deserve the good fortune which you have fallen heir to," she said, "because you weren't here in time to hear the will read."

"I suppose a fine large studio bequeathed to me has been found in a secret drawer," he replied.

"You are a good guesser. We have found just that."

"And its windows look toward the north," somebody added.

"It has an outside entrance, so you will avoid the un-æsthetic masses," said another.

"And the ceilings are high enough to 'sky' the pictures of your dearest foe."

"Come, now, this is taking unfair advantage of a fellow. Robert, will you stand by to see an old friend downtrodden like this? Why, they will soon make a 'torso' of me!"

The boy clapped his hands in delight.

"Oh, Mr. Holmes! Don't you truly know? Mother has given us her old Tinkham Street house for our very own. And you are to have the big 'extension' on the first floor for an art gallery. Isn't he, mother?"

"Well, well, this is too good to be true! Let me see, Robby, — how did the old woman in the nursery rhyme find out whether she was dreaming or not? —

'If this be I, which I don't think I be, —'

"Oh, it is true; indeed it is!" Robert insisted.

"I am afraid Mr. Holmes will think me inhospitable when he hears that you have all been turned out of doors," Mrs. Trumbull said.

"And deserted into the bargain," he added.

"Well, I confess that I feel like a shirk of the deepest dye, if that is any comfort to you," she returned. "I am ashamed to set you all at work again, then run away and leave you."

"'Tain't what I sh'd call shirkin' to do yer duty when it happens t' be a leetle grain pleasanter 'n common," Hannah objected, overhearing her mistress. "You an' Bobby, ye both need chirkin' up, — don't they, doctor?" Hannah

thought John rather young and frivolous, and rarely asked or accepted his advice.

"To be sure they do, Hannah," he answered; "and what is more, we want them to take a good long vacation so they will be more valuable to us when they come home."

"Who was it that said, 'It is better to set ten men at work, than to do ten men's work'?" asked Dr. Herrick.

"It was some fellow who did not know what women could do when they were once set a-going," responded Jack.

"There is no sex in work," Ruth corrected.

"There is in despots, though, as we know to our sorrow," said Harold.

"If you are going to snub Ruth, I shall carry her off."

"Come, Mrs. Trumbull, don't be hard on us. It is n't so easy to carry Ruth off as you may think," protested Dr. Williams.

"Do not give yourselves one anxious thought on our account while you are gone," Ruth said, with heightened color, turning to Mrs. Trumbull. "You must think of us at Number 49 Tinkham Street, as doing our best to deserve our privileges. Hannah and Mrs. Herrick will mother us; the boys will be on their honor; and we all shall be happy."



CHAPTER XXI.

THRUMS.

SO one day in June Robert and his mother sailed away. Before they had celebrated their country's birthday under a foreign flag the occupation of Number 49 Tinkham Street had been effected without resistance, and within a short month after the campaign was first proposed. The undertaking had not been serious. There is much truth in the saying, "If you want to make a man your friend, get him to do something for you." Ruth applied that principle to the case in point. She took pains to let it be noised abroad that the removal to Tinkham Street was to be made. Then she asked some of the boys to assist her. When, lo! every one who could so much as lay a hand upon the wagon counted himself happy. Indeed, had the transfer been made at night when they were all at leisure, — some street boys are not idle, — it is easy to imagine them fight-

ing for the privilege of helping her. Thus every fellow of the neighborhood immediately became a stock-owner in the concern, having invested in it his share of brain and muscle.

Of course Ruth did not look for great results to follow this new departure while the hot weather lasted ; but she spent a good deal of time over the cheerful appointments of the rooms, as well as in the choice of games and of illustrated papers whereby to beguile the boys indoors.

The carpenter's bench was placed at one end of the long drawing-room, and the shoemaker's at the other,—the supporting pillars serving to mark the boundary lines between the respective shops.

Mr. Holmes established himself, and set up an easel in the “extension,” among casts and pictures. Nothing could be pleasanter than the old library, which was the library still ; and the dining-room, opening out of it, made a perfect reading-room.

The second floor was fitted up as a gymnasium, easily transformed, on “assembly” nights, into a spacious hall.

After that, Number 49 Tinkham Street was always open evenings, and well patronized,—was it because nothing was required in return? What a fine place it was in which to sing, or to strum a banjo, with the windows open and a crowd of children gathered outside to hear and applaud !

Sometimes Michele would bring down the old hand-organ for Danny to grind. It was pretty well worn out, now, though Robert had promised to reinforce it with some new cylinders. Still it furnished music for dancing, in a neighborhood not too critical but very appreciative; and tired must be the little feet that failed to keep time when Danny turned the crank.

Now and then, when the evenings were cool, Dr. Herrick gave an informal talk about chemistry, illustrated with red and blue lights and fascinating explosions; or Harold treated the boys to a series of stereopticon pictures, — which, however, had disadvantages, the lights having to be extinguished.

It is not for a moment to be understood that the lads who were aggressive and unruly at Mrs. Trumbull's, were transformed into patterns of good behavior on their own territory. Human nature is about the same the world over, and some were as disagreeable and ill-conditioned subjects as any sociological student could desire. Among the fellows of this class who came the first night and still continued to come, — when he pleased, — was Patrick O'Toole. He was a big, mischievous boy, from whom the little ones instinctively shrank. Of course he was made welcome, — that was the only means to help him, — but he was always encroaching upon others' rights. He dictated, he criticised in an

unfriendly way, and yet his rollicking laugh was very catching.

One night Mrs. Herrick's attention was attracted by a heated conversation in a distant corner, waxing hotter every moment, until Michele sprang to his feet, and seizing Pat by the shoulder, cried out, —

“Eef-a you spick-a 'bout Mees Rut'-a, I-a *fir-re* you!” suiting the action to the word. A general uprising ensued, in which the room was cleared so quickly that nobody could tell how or why it had all happened.

A week went by, and Patrick did not return. Ruth, being the party aggrieved, decided to send for him. To her surprise Michele flatly refused to go. She explained that it was for Pat's sake that she wished it. “He will grow up an idle, wicked fellow, if we let him spend his time in the saloons,” she said.

“Me, I-a don' care,” he answered. “I-a no not-a go fin' Pad.”

“Then I suppose I must go alone.”

“Me, I-a goin' fight-a heem.” Michele's eyes flashed.

“Oh, you're a blamed dude,” jeered a ragged fellow, overhearing the conversation, who perhaps thought Michele too fastidious.

“Another mark of civilization,” thought Ruth, encouraged that Michele was equal to the self-control which could withhold his clenched fist from administering a desired blow for answer.

"Now, boys, do not quarrel," she said. "Who will go for me to find Patrick, and ask him to come back?"

Cries of "I will," and "Me," from half a dozen voices. Michele remained obdurate; so did Patrick, who sent a saucy message back to Ruth, besides.

During Mrs. Trumbull's absence, Ruth and Harold lived at the Stone House, which Hannah kept, as usual. One of their greatest pleasures that summer was in watching the young gardeners who cultivated garden-plots there. Each had his own small farm, free and independent, where he raised vegetables or flowers, according to his taste; and many an honest penny found its way to a pocket otherwise empty. If you had been a careful observer in the neighborhood of slumdom, you would have been very likely to see remarkable looking signs offering "green goods," — very green sometimes, — at the lowest market price, by "Hermann & Co." or the "Binckley Brothers," upon inquiring at Number 49 Tinkham Street.

Just about the time when the trades were introduced into Mrs. Trumbull's North Room, Major Carver conceived the idea of drilling a squad of the boys in military tactics. Notwithstanding infirm health and frequent absences, he managed to preserve something like discipline among them, until at last, one summer day, he sent John to

inform Ruth that he had surrendered unconditionally to rheumatism. This meant, of course, the abandonment of the "Young American Cadets."

"The poor old Major!" sighed Mrs. Herrick.

"The poor boys!" Ruth amended.

"Yes, I know it will be a blow to them. They need the drill of a stern old martinet, like the Major."

"Well, what about Tom Barnaby? Isn't he at home? I should think he would undertake to drill the boys this summer," suggested John.

"Yes, why not? We can ask him, at least."

"There's nothing mean about Ruth," he said. "She is always ready to give a poor fellow the chance to turn an honest penny!"

"Of course I am, John. Did I not secure your appointment here?"

"Did you, Ruthy? Then I never mean to resign."

He thought her very pretty as she bent over a rough little garment which she was mending.

"It is the small boys whom I am especially anxious about," she said, without looking up. "They have few resources, and the big fellows bully them so."

"It would be a great kindness if Tom would undertake to train them," said Mary Allen.

"Not at all," Ruth dissented. "He ought to be glad of the chance. It would do him good."

"Shall I ask him, then?"

"Please do, John. If he consents, it will be a thread to string the boys' hopes upon. And, John, make it plain to this newly fledged military youth that the obligation is on his side. Please remind him that he is to succeed a 'regular,' who is now suffering for service to his country. That may insure Tom's humility."

Straightway Mrs. Herrick and Ruth and Hannah began to talk among themselves of Tom Barnaby and the possibility of forming a military company, but with the intent of being overheard. They had little fear that he would fail them, and they knew that a whispered story goes further than a trumpeted notice.

While the arrangement with young Barnaby was still pending, Mrs. Herrick received a visit from an old friend from Philadelphia, who, having philanthropic instincts and some experience, soon became interested in this charitable venture. At her suggestion, instead of the usual drill, a temporary substitute was adopted, which had been employed with success among her own little lads. It especially appealed to the younger boys, and was called "Fun and Farming." The book of the tactics was ordered, and, under the supervision of this veritable "Lady from Philadelphia," shovels, spades, hoes, rakes, pick-axes, were procured suitable in size for the small hands that were to use them.

It was a pretty sight when, after a few preliminary directions, the younger boys marched in, two and two, wearing straw hats, each carrying on his right shoulder the tool which he was to use. Taking their position before the teacher, they lowered their tools at the sound of a chord on the piano, and at a second chord removed their hats and bowed to her. A few more evolutions with given chords, and they sang a song; after which, again to chords, they stacked tools, and took their first lesson in gardening.

“‘At what time of year can you begin to make garden?’” asked the teacher, reading both question and answer.

“‘As soon as the frost is out of the ground, usually in April,’” was the reply.

“‘What is the first thing to be done?’”

“‘Prepare the ground.’” Then followed other questions in order, about the preparation of the soil, the proper implements to use, the time for planting, and the appearance of each vegetable as it comes up.

This lesson closed with a song to the tune of, “Where are you Going, my Pretty Maid?” after which they marched out in real military style. It had scarcely seemed a lesson at all, so naturally did it go on.

When, a few days later, the second lesson in farming came, they were impatient to begin. There was plenty of singing to jolly tunes, and no

end of marching and manipulation of tools. Especially did they enjoy singing, "How the Corn Grew," to the tune of "Pat Molloy."

"There was a field that waiting lay
All hard, and brown, and bare;
There was a thrifty farmer came
And fenced it in with care.

CHORUS.

"For oh, for oh, he was a farmer's boy!
For he is the lad that ploughed the field,
And sowed the seed with joy."

There were eight verses, with a chorus to each, and when they were done, they would have liked to sing it all over again.

Some thought the stable exercise the best of all. It taught all the points of a good horse, and how to feed, harness, train, and drive him. This required another set of implements, as well as a harness and saddle and wagon. John the coachman was glad to be of use in this lesson, as the "Lady from Philadelphia" was not quite sure about putting the harness on the live "Dobbin" which a little girl offered to lend, instead of the toy horse which the book required. Dobbin was as gentle as a kitten, and seemed rather to enjoy the fun of illustrating this lesson as the boys put on and took off his small harness, or hitched him to his low cart.

The fifth lesson was about fruits, and here Michele was in his element. Under Johann's

tutorship he had already gained considerable dexterity with grafting-knife and wax ; and, by the way, Johann was always glad to supplement these exercises with object lessons in real seeds in the real earth, where there was plenty of room for them all to experiment.

One morning Ruth, sitting at her window, saw Spero in hot chase after a cat, dashing into the very heart of the boys' gardens. He knocked off roses, scattering the petals in a pink snowstorm, and finally brought the poor thing to bay in Michele's flower-bed. In vain Ruth called and scolded the dog. She cried to Johann to rescue the cat, who was holding her own against her rheumatic old enemy. The conflict was short but fierce. When it was ended, Michele's flower-bed was no more. Ruth knew how much it had been to the boy, and she was distressed to think of his disappointment.

"Michele, I want you to go into the garden with me," she said, when he came in soon after.

"Me?"

"Yes, I have some bad news for you."

Together they made their way to the tangled and wilted flower-bed.

"Michele, can you forgive poor old Spero for this mischief?" she asked, watching him intently.

"Spero?" he questioned suspiciously.

"Yes, dear, I saw him do it. He was teasing

a cat. They tore up the very ground, and we could not part them."

"So?" His face was dark and angry.

"Yes, it was Spero. Nobody was to blame. But we are all sorry. He did not know any better, of course. It would have been different if any one had picked the flowers without asking you. That would be stealing, you know, Michele." He did not reply. "Can you not see the difference?"

"I-a don' know," — stolidly spoken.

"Oh, yes you do, dear! You know God has forbidden us to take anything which does not belong to us. Dr. Herrick has often spoken about that. It is very wicked. Besides, nobody will trust a man who takes what does not belong to him."

"Me, I-a haf one-a time steal-a lily," he said simply.

"Then you are sorry, I know. You will never do such a thing again, will you, Michele?"

"No, Mees Rut'-a, I-a weel not-a. Fill ver'-a bad-a 'bout dat. I no not-a know to steal-a made God mad."

"Sorry, Michele, sorry, not mad. God is sorry that you should not wish to please Him; sorry that you should not love your neighbor; sorry, as you now feel, when Robert's poor old dog has spoiled your garden, — not angry, Michele. Remember that."

Just then Spero came out to meet them, wagging his feathery tail and jumping for joy. Michele stooped to pat him, as he said, —

“Ah! Spero ees-a ver'-a bad dog. Me, I-a fo'geeve-a 'eem.”





CHAPTER XXII.

BY THE GRACE OF GOD AND THIS MINE ARM.

RUTH, I want you to help me, you are such a 'fairy godmother,' " and Mary Allen slipped her hand through Ruth's arm as they walked home from church together one Sunday. "I know," she continued, "you are burdened already with all sorts of troubles of other people."

"No, indeed, Mary, not 'burdened,'" answered Ruth; "only busy with them."

"Well, I need not tell my story, — everybody knows it; — oh, Ruth, do help me to keep my dear brother from ruin!" Mary's voice trembled, and Ruth knew it had been a sore trial to speak of this sorrow.

"I, Mary?" she asked helplessly. "How can I help you, dear?"

"Oh, will you not?"

"Of course I shall be glad to try; but how? He is older than I am, and — why, Mary, I

scarcely know your brother, certainly not well enough to — ”

“All the better. He will not suspect you of trying to reform him,” returned the girl. “You see poor Willy was papa’s darling. The boy was never denied anything that money could buy. He was bright, always at the head of his classes, and a favorite wherever he went. In college he was ‘king of good fellows,’ and — he fell. In the middle of his junior year he was suspended. To escape disgrace he went to sea, and in his absence dear papa died. After that there was no money for any of us, and of course poor Will could not return to college. It was a bitter disappointment when he began to feel what he had missed. His old evil habit was his solace. You know the rest, Ruthy, — how with real ability and the taste for the profession of civil engineer which he would have honored and had already partly learned, he is simply a telegraph operator, with the ever present danger of losing his place ; for — ”

“Yes, dear, I know,” interposed Ruth, glad to save her friend another pang. “I am heartily sorry for him ; but I cannot see my way clear to doing anything which will be of use to him. I certainly cannot presume to advise him, and he cannot be asked to spend his evenings with street boys.”

“Why not, Ruth?” urged the sister. “Can’t

you think of something for him to do there? It would keep him from harm, at least."

Ruth promised to consult Mrs. Herrick, and Mary was a little comforted. The next evening Dr. Williams dropped in to see the boys and their friends. Ruth had the habit of thinking aloud when she needed advice of a general nature.

"I wonder how much an outfit for telegraphing would cost!" she said.

"Why not make one?" suggested the doctor.
"How?"

"What's the use of being a scientific man if one cannot put his knowledge to practical use?"

"Oh, I don't know. I did not suppose science helped people to make useful things. I know most college men stammer and hesitate when they come across a sentence of Latin or Greek which they did not happen to learn outright."

"See here, Harold, come and protect your friend," cried Dr. Williams, laughing. "But what do you want a telegraphic apparatus for, if a layman may be so bold?"

"Yes, sir, you may, provided the instrument be forthcoming. I wish to have the art of telegraphy taught to at least one or more of the boys. Besides, I want to learn it myself."

"There you have me at a disadvantage. I am not an expert telegrapher."

"No, I guessed that. But I know a young man

who is, and who will help me, I think, if the instrument is produced in good time."

If the doctor muttered something about erecting a guillotine for another man to decapitate him, Ruth pretended not to hear. Nevertheless, he entered heartily into her plan. It was not many days before the pantry was put into communication with the stable, and Billy Binckley begged to be the first pupil enrolled as telegraph operator when he should have mastered the business.

As soon as it was ready Ruth went up to the station with a despatch which she wished to send. She read it slowly to William Allen, asking him to repeat it to her. She explained with deliberation that she was particular to have it correct, and she knew he would take pains.

"Is telegraphy difficult to learn?" she asked, as he promised to oblige her.

"Oh, no, not at all," he replied. "I wish it were a little more engrossing; time hangs heavy on my hands with little to occupy my mind."

"Do you have too much leisure, then?" she asked.

"Yes, indeed; I am tired of the sight of this place. It is no way to live, when a fellow is good for a thousand things that are better worth doing. I beg your pardon, Miss Havens," — stopping suddenly.

"I do not wonder that you are bored with this monotony ; but I cannot help being glad also that you have so much time on your hands. Will you not spare a little to me?"

He seemed surprised. "To you?" he said.

"Yes, to Mrs. Herrick and me. Have n't you heard Mary speak of our evenings with boys at Number 49 Tinkham Street?"

"With boys?" — an amused smile played over his face.

"Yes, we are trying to teach them something, and to make them happy at the same time. We have a telegraph, — plant, do you call it? — and no man to run it." Will laughed. "Now, if you could give us an hour or so every night, it would be a great kindness."

"Why, of course I can. I shall be glad to do it, if you wish," he assented. "When shall I begin? To-night?"

"Yes, indeed, if you will be so good."

So it came to pass that in due time William Allen was added to the staff of instruction.

A rosy flush on neck and cheek betrayed his past habits ; but there was no taint upon his breath, no uncertainty of step or touch, as, night after night, he took his place in the house which was honored by his effort to become again a man. The very qualities which had been the chief factors in his downfall made him a favorite in the motley family which adopted him.

And by the way, it was no sinecure to be a member of this same "staff." Harold himself declared that the only man that ever had an easy time was the retired major who used to exercise the class in military drill ; since he had the opportunity of dealing with human nature in the original package. It was quite another matter to come into contact with individuals, as all the other " professors " did.

"It is much less trouble to play at philanthropy by sending a generous check to a charitable organization, or by providing by proxy Christmas dinners for the poor, than to invade the slums in person," remarked young Parke, the banker's son, one night, after a tour of inspection through the house.

"Did you ever happen to test either method?" Ruth asked slyly.

"See here, Miss Havens, — give me the chance, and I'll give you the opinion of an expert," he answered, unabashed. "Appoint me a member of your staff, Mrs. Herrick, to test my capabilities."

"First prove your fitness for an office so lucrative," persisted Ruth.

"Don't do it!" cried Dr. Williams. "He would instigate a mutiny if he were to be sent out into the highways to compel our guests to come in."

"Well, depend upon it, I shall find a backer

somewhere," said Mr. Parke. "And, in the mean while, I know, if I ask her, Miss Allen will use her influence in my behalf."

"That fellow needs us as much as we need him," said William Allen, after young Parke had gone. "He spends his time at the club and his money in fast horses; yet he is not at all a bad fellow. I believe he would be useful if he were only shown how to be."

"We might install him master of deportment," laughed Dr. Williams.

"Not a bad idea," returned Ruth. "We are in search of an incumbent of that office; but we did not know where to look for a competent teacher."

"Come, Ruthy, do not score a fellow like that. I'll give in. Parke shall have my vote for the position, with any salary he will name."

Mary Allen had said nothing. In her short term of service she had done quiet and effective work as Ruth's trusty lieutenant. Remembering Ruth's tact in dealing with her brother, Mary had connived at young Parke's offer of assistance, and she was sorry that he should have been so cavalierly put off. She felt he ought to have been encouraged. Now she feared he would be vexed at having placed himself in a position to be snubbed. Ruth guessed Mary's anxiety, and, when they were alone, referred to it again.

"Bless you, dear," she comforted, "we did it

for his own good. Don't you know he came here in his new clothes, to patronize and criticise? He would not have had a spark of respect for us if we had snapped him up, as a trout swallows a fly. Of course we mean to have him, but we must not let him know it. He is too good a man to be spoiled by flattery. There is not the slightest chance of losing him, Mary; do not worry."

The young man's discomfiture was easier to bear, however, than Ruth's, when, the next morning, she received a scented note, bearing an engraved crest and containing a generous check, "to be used for the purpose of making boys nobler and better than the man who signs himself, Your sincere friend, H. Clay Parke."

Ruth read it and blushed like the "American Beauty" that she was. To keep back the tears of mortification, she said bravely, —

"Done like a man! That will pay for fitting up our open-air gymnasium."

"And Parke is an athlete, you know," suggested Dr. Williams.

"Really?" Mary's face glowed with pleasure. "Then we must bear him in mind when we elect the professor for that chair."

If it required a little tact to arrange the matter, the three women were quite equal to that; and in the end it was managed to the young man's satisfaction. The boys forgave him for being

such a "swell cove," because he was such royal good company, and an athlete besides. The check went for a vacant lot near by, to be used as a playground for street-children, and fitted up with see-saws and sand-piles and swings.

Mightily did the melon-patch flourish that year. There was promise of a plentiful harvest, too; but before the fruit was fairly ripe, it began to disappear. Now, a boy likes a luscious melon no more heartily than he hates to be cheated of his rights, so they all took turns in watching for the thief. Hannah's suspicion began to point toward an old colored man who came for a pail of milk every morning. She was of opinion that "Uncle Pete" could tell, if he would, where to find the person who was more fond of melons than of honesty. But as Pete would throw no light on the subject, they determined to put a stop to the business in their own way.

It was easier to find a suit of old clothes at Number 49 Tinkham Street than to spare them. Finally, however, such a suit was provided. The boys stuffed it full of hay, and borrowed a broad-brimmed hat of Johann to tie on the creature's head. Putting a rope around its neck, they hoisted it, after dark, to the projecting limb of an apple-tree, where it could be seen from the bars of the lane leading melonward. Later on, a dozen boys on watch hid themselves behind trees, under bushes, and within the shadow of the

barn. And, in the mean while, sheeted in white, tall and gaunt, Leck stalked among the vines.

They had not long to wait. When the red moon was rising from behind a cloud, and when honest folk were supposed to be asleep, a wild shriek was heard, followed by such groans that Hannah, also watching, was half inclined to give an alarm, though she had helped to array the ghost.

"'Pears ter me ye don't seem so smart's common," she sympathized, as she filled Uncle Pete's pail with milk the next morning. He had come rather later than usual, and appeared dejected.

"Yas 'm."

"Ain't yer health good?" she persisted.

"Ya-as 'm." The old man hesitated. "De fac' am, honey, I done got de mis'ry bad, las' night."

"E't suthin'?"

"No, chile, not dat kin'."

"Orter take suthin' fer yer blood, mebb'y."

"Yas 'm." Uncle Pete was not inclined to talk. "How's yer missus?" he asked.

"She w's well 'nough, when we heerd last."

He lowered his voice and glanced around.

"See heah, honey; dyah's 'fiction comin' to dis yer' fambly, fo' long, sut'n'y."

"I never! How'd you find that out?"

"I done seed suthin' las' night dat skeer me a-mos' blin'."

"Well, ye can't 'skeer' me. Mebby ye seen a ghost," mocked Hannah.

"Hesh, chile ! Fo' de lan's sake, don' speak dat a-way. Yas 'm, you-all 's done got a pow'ful warnin' dis time, sho' 'nough."

"Hello, Uncle Pete, what's the matter?" asked Harold, coming in at that moment.

"Go 'long, honey. Young folks don't un'stan' nuffin 'bout spooks an' witches," answered the old man.

"But I heard you say something was going to happen. What is it?"

"Look heah, chile, don' you go trouble yo' hade 'bout sperits, yit."

"Spirits !" echoed Harold. "Now you must tell us, after rousing our curiosity."

Thus urged, Uncle Pete made a clean breast of his "speeyunce."

"We-all gwine long de road las' night, nigh 'bout moon-up, an' we ain' no mo'n got jes' b'yan' de baws, w'en we cas' ou' eye up 'mirin' de apples on dat poun'-sweetin', an' ef dyah warn' a dade co'pse a-swingin' on de branches. An' de win' blowin' tur'ble."

"I never !" exclaimed Hannah.

"Yas 'm, 'pear like hit wavin' hit awms an' bowin' to us, sho' 's I lib an' breave an' draw de breff ob life, an' hope de baws 'll cotch me."

"No !" in chorus.

"Yas 'm, an' hit tu'n hit eyes on us mons'ous

pinted, an' hit roll 'em awful. Den dat p'tickler time a big white ghos', taller 'n de chu'ch steeple, rise right outen de groun', quicker 'n yo' could bat yo' eye, an' hit walk, an' walk, wif de grabecloses all a-hangin' 'roun' hit, w'ite as de dribben snow."

"Why, uncle, you describe it like a reporter," complimented Harold.

"Yo' wou' n't dar ter fool, sah, ef yo' done heah dem tur'ble screeches like de dade risin' outen der graves," reproved the narrator.

"Guess he 's 'bout right," said Hannah. "'Pears to me I heerd somethin' like screeches 'bout that time last night, m'self."

"I heard something, too ; did n't you, Ruthy?" asked Harold.

"Take care, you chillun ! fo' de lan's sake don' ac' triffin' !" The old man's crinkly wool almost straightened as he recalled the scene. "I tell yo'-all, hit's a mighty bad sign t' see ghosses, an' I done s'picionate yo' gwine git hu't sho' 'nough."

"I wonder who else seen them spirityu'l manifestations?" demanded Hannah.

"I done disremember, honey, 'deed I do," replied the wary old man, as he shifted his weight from one foot to the other, and confusedly fingered his tattered old hat. "I 'se dat skeered yis'dy evenin', I don' know nuffin'."

Harold's comforting assurance failed to allay the old man's anxiety.

“Oh, well, uncle, don’t worry about this family,” he said. “It’s the people who see the ghost that are always the ones to have the trouble ; so we are n’t afraid.”

There were plenty of delicious cantaloupes for breakfast the next morning, and, indeed, to the end of the melon season, and the “Young American Cadets” were supplied with fruit from their own melon-vines.





CHAPTER XXIII.

A RIBAND IN THE CAP OF YOUTH.

IT was no matter of surprise that, after a few months of association, the lads gathered nightly at Number 49 Tinkham Street should conceive the idea of forming a club. What boy on American soil, even though he be foreign-born, is proof against the allurements of organization? The very atmosphere is club-generating, and these boys made no attempt to resist their fate. It would have been a heart of stone that could withstand the posters which appeared one day on the bulletin-board:—

ATENSHUN ALL.

A METIN IS WANTED TO START A CLUB OF US
BOYS TER NITE. POLLYTIKS DEBATTIN GAMES
AN SECH THINS DUN THAR. METE IN JIMNASHUN,
8 SHARP.

When the time came, the boys were left to themselves to make a beginning,—the Staff believing it wisest to trust them to work out their own thought rather than to feel themselves under the supervision or even under the direct influence of others. William Allen and Harold were present to keep the peace in case of a disturbance; for the boys were by no means equal to the self-restraint which is sometimes called into demand by questions of parliamentary law among older persons than they. By common consent Nardo took the initiative.

“Set down, boys, an’ dry up,” he commanded, rapping on the table with a hammer.

“Wot ye givin’ us?” demanded a burly fellow; “ain’t we come here ter talk ’f we wan’ ter?”

“Not till yer spoke ter, ye bet,” said Sandy Binckley, whose early discipline had taught him that discretion which is the better part of valor.

“I motion we start a club,” said Nardo, when he had succeeded in restoring order.

“Ol-a righ’,” answered Michele.

“Say, ‘I secun’ de moshun,’” corrected Nardo.

“All right, then, I do,” amended Billy.

“Who ’s goin’ ter be pres’dunt?”

“Nardo! Nardo!” vociferously from the meeting.

“Robert!” from several voices.

“He ain’t here,” maintained the majority.

"I 'lect Nardo," Michele vouchsafed.

"You 're it!" yelled Billy.

"Ye got ter vote," declared the candidate, confident of the result.

"All right! All 't wants Nardo ter be pres'-dunt, say 'Yis,'" commanded Sandy Binckley, with authority.

"Yis, yis, yis!" in wild chorus.

"Naw, naw," faintly from the rear.

"Hello! Shet up, back thar, wull ye?" roared Tom Murphy, springing to his feet. "Ye 'd bettther kape shtill till ye 're ast ter holler. Now! Ary feller what dast kin say 'Naw.'"

Silence reigned, and without opposition Nardo was declared "It." Then ensued a scramble, which proved to be the effort to shove the willing president into the place of honor.

Upon whispered consultation with Harold as to the way to do it, a series of stringent laws and regulations were formulated without hesitation or much difficulty. A secretary, treasurer, — for there were dues to be collected, of course, — and a doorkeeper were chosen to assist the president, who, however, seemed quite independent of advice or assistance from any quarter. By the by-laws, smoking, drinking, and gambling were prohibited; swearing, apparently, had already gone out of fashion.

"Wot's goin' ter be done with the cash?" inquired a prudent fellow who objected to dues.

"I dunno," answered Nardo; "it's de way ter do," — evidently having informed himself upon the subject.

"Start a bank!" suggested somebody. The idea was fetching, but the method was too taxing for young financiers who had probably never possessed a surplus dime, and they referred the matter, after some discussion, to Mr. Parke, who was known to be authority in such matters. It was at last arranged that a fee of five cents should be paid monthly by each member, which sum should be held in trust for the benefit of "any feller wat wus broke an' wanted boostin'," as some one happily explained. Harold asked if they could not save something for themselves, beside the club-fees, each having his own bank-book, and entering the amounts paid, so one could see just how he stood. "Then you could feel sure of something with which to start in life after you leave here," he said. Perhaps it was the apposition of the two ideas which struck the Club favorably; for they accepted the plan with avidity. The boys who could spend a few pennies in gum or tobacco, or who could stake a nickel on a game of marbles, were certainly able to lay aside that much when self-denial was called into play. It was wonderful how soon they developed the details of their business. It was agreed that the weekly deposits were to be handed over to Michele, the treasurer of the Club, who in turn

should transfer them for safekeeping at the end of each month to their banker, Mr. Parke. Results soon proved the wisdom of the venture ; for nothing better serves to promote conscious self-respect than to be a stock-holder in some corporation with ever so small a share of capital. The Staff soon had reason to congratulate itself on the influence of this banking scheme upon the boys themselves.

Over the question of adopting a name, great excitement prevailed. Every boy who had given it previous consideration insisted on the one which he had chosen. Those who had not thought of it, took sides with their friends. Neither party was willing to yield the point, and the new club seemed in danger of civil war, when Michele, standing on a chair, put his hands to his mouth and yelled to such purpose that temporary silence was established.

"Say," he cried, wildly gesticulating, "say ! Mees-a Rut' can-a know. She tell-a de righd name."

"Hurrah for Mike !" shouted Harold, so suddenly that nobody knew who had spoken. But the happy thought met with instant sanction. Cries of "Hurrah !" and "Ask Miss Ruth !" were enthusiastically taken up.

"Appoint a committee to consult with her," Harold whispered in the president's ear.

"Order !" thundered Nardo, rapping smartly

with a hammer. "I 'point a committee to ask Miss Ruth."

"Who? Who?" from the meeting.

"Mike an' " — surveying the company — "an' me." The Club was appeased. It is presumed that no record of the subsequent interview was made; but, not long after, bulletins were posted calling a meeting of "The Young American Club," and those who knew best were not slow to guess that the author of the patriotic name had chosen it for Robert's sake.

With almost every week after the introduction of the system of occupations, fresh interests were awakened and new schemes developed, until the place seemed like a big bee-hive humming with busy life. The telegraph corps had rigged a series of electric bells all over the house; and William Allen's weekly lecture on practical science, often illustrated by experiments, was very popular. Another evening Dr. Williams gave emergency talks, with directions about what to do, and how to do it, in case of accident or sudden illness, which the young medical students were often pleased to practise upon one another, with or without the consent of the victim.

One day Michele called Ruth aside and told her, with more feeling than she had believed him capable of, that Patrick was very ill. Michele conducted her to the wretched place where the poor fellow lay tossing in the delirium of fever,

his only nurse a boy younger than himself. It was a simple matter to remove Patrick to the hospital, yet many a long day passed before he left it. In the struggle between life and death the odds seemed against him ; but youth and good care prevailed. After he began to recover, Ruth often visited him. She carried him delicacies and flowers. She sent Michele with a bright, comfortable gown for him. She read to him. She talked with him — or tried to — as she would to Harold or Robert, — of himself, of his small world, of his future. Poor boy ! perhaps it was the first hint of any future that ever came to him. At first he turned away from her, with a downcast look that betrayed his shame at having treated her so ill. Then she told him that she knew he was sorry, and she had long ago forgiven him. After that he seemed to live on her visits. When at last he was discharged from the hospital, Ruth found him a place where he could earn an honest living among decent people. He was rather slow to find his way to Number 49 Tinkham Street, but to his surprise, when he did come, he was received with a rousing cheer.



CHAPTER XXIV.

TAKING ACCOUNT OF STOCK.



THE return of Mrs. Trumbull and Robert was at hand. To those who had counted their absence by days, it was a supreme event. Hannah had out-generalled herself in deploying her forces to "clean house thorough," — both houses, in fact. She had even taken grim satisfaction in Harold's taunt that she was the poorest housekeeper in the world, since she was always scrubbing.

Ruth had sat down soberly to take account of her own stewardship ; for, in pursuing the course which she had marked out, she regarded herself as simply a promoter of Mrs. Trumbull's undertaking. Yet only in the strictest sense was Ruth her friend's almoner. While she spent Mrs. Trumbull's money generously, and kept account of it, she spent herself still more freely, keeping no account of the small coin of friendly service

and human sympathy whose daily outgo made a princely sum.

The travellers had a royal welcome,—old friends, neighbors, the Club, the Staff, Ruth, Hannah, each vying with the other to do them honor. Tom Warren condescended to marshal his “Nine”—save one—to meet Robert at the train. Even Michele was betrayed into an unheard-of expression of the delight which was oozing through every pore of his countenance.

“*Carissimo!*” he cried, lapsing into his mother-tongue as he almost crushed Robert’s small hand in a sturdy grasp.

And Robert? He threw about Michele’s neck a pair of loving arms, and hugged him like a young bear.

Among the letters awaiting Mrs. Trumbull was one which she read with such changing expression and so many stifled exclamations as to attract Robert’s attention. And his curiosity was by no means appeased when she put into his hand another note, which had been enclosed. He knew it at a glance, crumpled and soiled though it was, to be the missing letter. He turned it over and over, as Michele had done, but with far greater interest. “Where has it been all this time? And how has it come here now?” were questions that Robert asked himself as his eyes travelled down the page.

“Where is the check?” he asked his mother.

"That is the question. Listen to the letter which enclosed this ;" and she read : —

MY DEAR MADAM : — I am filled with wonder and concern upon receiving the enclosure, dated more than two years ago, and evidently having survived a remarkable experience. I thank you warmly for your kind intention to assist me toward the payment for which I solicited your aid, and I should gladly have availed myself of the check alluded to had I received it in time. Indeed, although you apparently meant to enclose it, it has never reached me.

As there seems to be some mystery attending the disappearance of the check and the suppression of the letter, which you will perhaps wish to clear up, I return it to you. Please observe that the postmark is of recent date, which goes to prove that the letter has not been sticking to some mail-bag all this time.

Again thanking you, I am, my dear madam,
Gratefully yours,

"Can you account for this in any way, Robert?" she asked, when she had finished.

"No, mother ; only I *know* that Mike had nothing to do with it," Robert answered, meeting her eyes frankly. And she forbore to gainsay him, with a sigh that it seemed best so.

While Ruth had kept Mrs. Trumbull and Robert informed of successes, — failures were never mentioned in her letters, — neither was prepared for the story of progress which the summer had to tell. And not the least among

their blessings was counted the service of Tom Barnaby, — Lieutenant Thomas Benton Barnaby, to speak by the card, — who had drilled the “Young American Cadets.”

Like many another young commander, his discipline was strict, his orders arbitrary. Nevertheless, his authority was never scouted by a lad among them all, lest his own name be dropped from the roster, — so fascinating is the art of war. And was not the glory of marching the dusty streets to the sound of fife and drum, compensation enough for an oath restrained or a blow withheld? Then there was the Saturday afternoon drill in the Park! In all, there were thirty boys in “Company A,” and ten more were clamoring for admission. Their applications were entered on file, with the understanding that four weeks of good conduct, certified to by two members of the police in a boy’s own precinct, should entitle him to membership.

“And they are living up to the requirements, I hear,” said young Barnaby, talking about it with Mrs. Trumbull.

“How are your officers chosen?” she asked.

“Oh, I recommend them according to proficiency in their trades or studies, and the company is free to elect from the list.”

“How does Nardo get on in arithmetic?”

“Well, of course. There’s where the ‘shark’ comes in. Such boys are taught how to count money as soon as their eyes are open. They are

ready enough to compute its possibilities, on any basis, imaginary or otherwise. There is Michele, for example. He is as sharp at figures as a little calculating machine."

"They say he is a capital treasurer of the 'Club,' never making mistakes, and screwing the dues out of boys who are inclined to be careless or thriftless."

"Yet he does not neglect his work. His teacher thinks he will succeed as an engraver when he has mastered his trade."

"The 'Club' itself is the wonder of it all," Dr. Williams interposed. "The boys already have a very good idea of parliamentary law, and to disregard the rules of order is certain and speedy ejection without benefit of clergy. The debates are more forcible than elegant, I grant; but the fellows have ideas, which they are not slow to clothe in language which they themselves understand."

"What subjects do they usually choose?" asked Mrs. Trumbull.

"Oh, simple matters which any man can settle, such as 'Tariff against Free Trade,' 'Strikes,' 'Trade-Unions,' and kindred topics."

"Does Tommy Murphy still 'roise to a pint oov ordher'?" asked Ruth.

"By the same token, that same Tommy is a fine fellow. He is the kind of stuff soldiers are made of," said Barnaby.

"Don't believe it. Poor little Jacky is twice as plucky, even if he can't hold a musket or stand up straight," Ruth objected.

"Tommy means to be brave," said Harold, "but he protests too much. He is very 'desavin', and you are not the first one taken in by his brag and bluster. Still, he is an honest, decent chap, after all, thanks to Ruthy and her Blarney stone." He patted her hand and smiled as he teased her.

Hannah held radical opinions as to the valor of certain cadets.

"Braggin' boys ain't wuth a cent to tie to," she said; "no more 'n a town crier'd do fer a preacher. 'F ye want t' see a fightin' soldier, he'll have to be stuffed with suthin' b'sides air. I never!"

Whether it was but the stirring of the clods under which the seeds of industry were sprouting, or the natural result of laborious, unskilful preparation of the many notices which play a part so important in every confederation of boys, the fact remains that somebody thought of a printing-press, and Robert forthwith besought his mother to advertise for one. The members of the "Young American Club" were industrious readers of the "Morning Star" for the next few days, and, happily, as Michele with patient finger was slowly creeping down the miscellaneous column he came upon the desired answer. To be sure, the press, when they found it, was neither very good nor

very new ; nevertheless, it was a printing-press, and good enough to learn on. What to print, was the next thing. This was Robert's opportunity. He would start a newspaper. Of course he did not know how, but Ruth's uncle was the editor of the "Morning Star," and Robert knew he would willingly give some hints to a young journalist. Besides, was not Harold a practical printer? He could show them how to set type and give them an idea of the general make-up of a paper. Robert engaged his friends to write articles, — Dr. Herrick, Mary Allen, and Ruth. Mr. Parke could write a fine financial editorial, Robert knew. More than that, he insisted on contributions of news from every branch of industry represented in the house. When Michele begged off because he could not "write Inglis' good," Robert's happy thought served him in good turn.

"Write in Italian, Mike ; then you can't be laughed at," — which Michele did. All this time Michele had been working very hard to learn wood-engraving. In these days it would be hard to find a town too small to publish a newspaper with its own illustrations, and Harold had no trouble in getting instruction for the boy. Together he and Robert planned to give their patrons a surprise, — which was successfully achieved, — in the fact that the first number of "The Bee" bore on its first page a fair picture of Number 49

Tinkham Street, with the legend: "M. Caputo, Artist."

The short evenings were not long enough for all there was to be done, and Robert could scarcely contain his happiness. It seemed as if the boys had caught the infection of his enthusiasm. Now that Ruth was well known among her new neighbors, she began to find herself in request. Indeed, it was not uncommon for her to receive visits from mothers, seeking friendly counsel, or asking that she use some special influence over their own wilful, wicked sons.

From time to time, as the cooler nights came on, other occupations were introduced to meet a new demand. Robert's scroll-saw was brought down and set up in a corner, Michele delighting to furnish patterns for it. It was at this time that a young German wood-carver, for want of a shop of his own, was given a place to work with the boys. And so cleverly did he execute an order which Mrs. Trumbull gave him that it led to the formation of a day-time class of her friends to learn the art. If his fellow artisans were at first inclined to regard him with jealousy, they were quickly disarmed by the reflection — which Mrs. Herrick took pains to emphasize — that skilled labor of any kind would always be in demand. And Hannah hastened to clinch the argument by saying, —

"Yes, I ollers think twicet, b'fore I trust a

feller 't says he can 'do *anything*,' to work fer me. I never! 'T 'pears t' me 't's much as ever you can larn in a lifetime 's to do one thing right."

Mrs. Trumbull seconded Hannah by recommending the boys to double diligence in order to become masters of the various trades in which they were engaged, — a hint which Hans Herrman took to heart. For, to Robert's satisfaction, now that there was something to do, the Herrman brothers came regularly, and were working with selfish pertinacity, — each stolidly making the most of his opportunity to serve his own individual end.

Every Saturday night they were all gathered in the gymnasium upstairs, where, until ten o'clock, it was jolly enough. Ruth could play all the popular airs and patriotic songs, and could sing them too. Now and again one or two banjos, and even a guitar, found its way there, — for the poorest sometimes falls heir to such a luxury. One evening in the month they invited girls, when the music was so good that Robert said it was great fun to run an opposition to the saloon across the way, which had just bought a new orchestrion to draw the crowd.

The Sunday-school was unique. Commonly made up of boys and girls who attended the Saturday night "assembly," with perhaps a covey of little ones from the street, it was, for conven-

ience, divided into sections, with a "teacher" for each division. To begin with, Dr. Herrick taught the whole school together, like an infant class, — as indeed it was. Simply and naturally he told the story of the life of Christ, illustrating it with the best possible pictures. Now and then he fell into the error of asking questions of the children, often to repent his rashness. The music was stirring and devotional, set to hymns with simple words, which were read before singing.

So Ruth turned her back upon discouragement, counting herself happy in having won for herself the freedom of the slums.





CHAPTER XXV.

THE OLD, OLD STORY.

AFTER Mrs. Trumbull had settled into the usual routine, the excitement of the home-coming having subsided, she was impressed by the stillness which pervaded the house. She missed something, and no wonder; for, notwithstanding her satisfaction in the return of her mistress, Hannah's voice was silent, for the first time within the memory of her contemporaries. Moreover, since her attention was directed toward Hannah, Mrs. Trumbull noticed that her kitchen had lost something of its pristine freshness.

"The place looks ter'ble mussy," apologized the old woman, "but things does git wopsed up in a jiffy 'when the's so many a-settin' 'round; but I dunno 's I want any less folks about. But it does make a body kinder absent-minded t' hev so much a-goin' on. I never! I guess ye don't think I'm overly neat, Mis' Trumbull."

“But, Hannah,” Mrs. Trumbull encouraged, “you should have Bridget help you more. She is willing. You work too hard; I cannot see what there is to do more than usual.”

Hannah bustled about as she always did when she did not choose to reason with her mistress.

“I hear your sewing-machine going when you ought to be in bed,” pursued Mrs. Trumbull.

Hannah was a promoter of industry, and it was not a new thing for her to “take time by the forelock.” Now, however, she coughed uneasily, and looked like a culprit.

“Well, Mis’ Trumbull, I dunno’s it ’s any use o’ mincin’ matters. I s’pose I might ’s well tell the hull truth out an’ out, fust ’s well ’s last. The Cap’n, he’s gi’n up sea-farin’, an’ he’s ben a lone man sence he lost his fust wife, an’ I thought I might ’s well marry him out o’ hand, ’s ter hev him hangin’ ’round pesterin’ me, doin’ nothin’.”

“Hannah!”

“Yissum, I don’t wonder ye say ‘Hannah.’ I ’m s’prised ’nough ter say it myself, sometimes, an’ I do, too. If I’d a thought I’d ’a’ made sech a fool o’ myself at my age, ’s I hev, I b’lieve I’d a gone an’ drowned myself when I was young ’nough t’ know better. But it ’s the gospel truth, an’ the time is gittin’ short now; ’s the hymn says:—

‘That awful day will surely come,
The appointed hour makes haste!’

“What are your plans, Hannah?” asked Mrs. Trumbull. “Have you made any?”

“No, mom, not reely. I don’t s’pose the Cap’n ’ll be very vallyble away from the ‘Lizy Ann,’ but I could n’t stan’ it a mite longer ter have him on that plaguy ocean, an’ I jest up an’ wrote him so, an’ ’f he did n’t give it up he could give me up, perty quick, an’ he did. Now he thinks it’s his turn to boss, an’ he ain’t willin’ ’t I should work out, — afterwards.”

“Does that mean that I shall lose you, Hannah?”

“Yissum, that ’s about the Inglish on it, an’ I feel dretful ’bout it, too; but the Bible says, ‘Leave father an’ mother, an’ cleave to yer husband.’ He says he’s as fond of the ‘Lizy Ann’ as he was of his fust wife; so I s’pose I orter be willing to bear some of the self-denyin’.”

“How many wives has the Captain had?”

Hannah hung her head and puckered the hem of her apron. “Only one yit,” she answered.

“Oh! Well, Hannah, I ’ll not stand in your way, though I shall miss you more than you will ever know. You are my trusty friend, as good as gold.” Hannah responded with a few tears to such unstinted praise from a woman who rarely bestowed commendation.

“Robert will be heart-broken,” Mrs. Trumbull went on. “I am sorry to spoil his good times with such melancholy news.”

"Oh, he knows it a'ready. I had to tell him and Mike, they pestered me so ter'ble 'bout the Cap'n."

"Then shall I tell the others?"

"Yissum, ye can 'f ye 've a mind to. I dunno 's it 'll make much diff'runce this time o' day. I s'pose it 'll all come out, sooner or later, fer we're goin' ter be married Thanksgivin'. Better the day, better the deed,' ye know." Hannah was trying to be facetious to keep her own courage up.

"Hannah! Why, it is only a fortnight before Thanksgiving Day."

"Yissum, it's the gospel truth. The Cap'n, he's a-comin' this day week, an' I thought I'd ruther hev it over with, 'n to let it fret me to a bone a-dreadin' on't. He's jest crazy to git me."

A smile lingered on her seamy old face, and Mrs. Trumbull thought of the happy day long vanished when she had told Hannah her own love-story. She sighed as she left her, but wasted no anxiety over Hannah's reluctant consent, so flatly did her manner belie her words.

If a pleasure shared is twice enjoyed, surely an anxiety is half borne by the telling; so Hannah seemed to recover her spirits after she had confided in her mistress, for scarcely was the door shut behind her when Mrs. Trumbull heard her voice uplifted joyously as she sang,

“ Oh for a shout of sacred joy
To God the sovereign King !
Let every land their tongues employ,
And hymns of triumph sing ! ”

As soon as Mrs. Trumbull found the opportunity, she broke the news of Hannah's intentions to the Staff. Aside from personal attachment to Hannah, and respect for her, they all recognized her loss as a misfortune.

“ There is one thing which would make Hannah's taking-off a blessing in disguise,” said the old Major, who was retained on the advisory board, and who, in the present state of his anatomy, was better for counsel than for war.

“ For shame ! ” laughed Ruth. “ I believe you are envious of the Captain.”

“ Why not let the young couple live at No. 49 Tinkham Street, *au premier*, and chaperone the Club ! ” he pursued.

“ Capital ! ” seconded the Staff in chorus.

“ Then with Hannah to mother them, could n't we take in girls too ? There would be plenty of room, and we could — ”

“ Come, come, Miss Allen,” Dr. Williams interrupted. “ You are using your scissors ruthlessly to cut out work for us. Would it not be safe to consult Hannah on that point ? ”

“ And the Captain 'll have something to say on that score,” said Ruth.

“ He is a great admirer of the ‘ fair sect,’ and

without doubt he will aid and abet us," pursued Mrs. Trumbull. "At least, he is not likely to object, for Hannah thinks that, once aboard his inland craft, he will feel less like a captain than a passenger."

"In the mean while," suggested Harold, "let us make Hannah's wedding the feature of Thanksgiving Day."

"And give her a royal send-off," supplemented the Major.

Mrs. Trumbull did not enter the less warmly into all their schemes because it was an effort to be cheerful in the face of losing her faithful servant and friend, — sturdy monitor though she often had been. The time was short, as Hannah had said, and preparations progressed apace under energetic hands, which were not the less loving. But the bride-elect sank into a state of melancholy pitiful to see. Robert followed her with wistful eyes, and Michele dogged her steps in humble eagerness to serve her. So do our common blessings take on new beauty when we fear to lose them. Under less exalted conditions Spero would certainly have come to grief. He lost no opportunity to creep into the till of Hannah's new trunk, and to cuddle cosily into her best bonnet. He would jump upon her work-table, and with canine skill tramp round and round, making his comfortable bed in the folds of her snowy linen, where he would dream until Hannah herself roused him from his luxurious couch.

Meanwhile, the second story of Number 49 Tinkham Street was undergoing complete renovation and furnishing for the comfort of the Captain and Hannah, and to their taste. Nothing was left for heart to wish ; and among their wedding-gifts was a life-lease of the apartments, together with a comfortable annuity so long as either should survive.

“ Ruth, you look happier than the bride-elect ! ” Dr. Williams remarked one day, while this preparation was in progress.

“ I am ashamed to be thinking of my own affairs at such a time, but — ”

“ Well, I am not ashamed to be thinking of mine, Ruthy. Now that Hannah can mother your settlement, — if you must have one, — it will leave you free. I have thought of that from the first.”

“ Oh, John ! ”

“ Yes, dear, I ’ll willingly stand by you, and help too ; but they can’t have you soul and body : you belong to me.” He had taken her hands in his, regarding her earnestly.

“ Oh, John, John ! you will break my heart ! Please spare me. Can you not see that I must go on ? I am set apart for my work as truly as a man feels himself called to the ministry.”

“ All right, dear ; do your work. Did I not promise to help you ? ”

“ Dear John, how can I make you understand ?

It is not your vocation, and you would not be willing to divide me with — anybody."

"Indeed I would not. But I could share you with a lot of — duties."

"No, I cannot even listen to you. I chose this work before I ever knew you cared for me."

"Ruth Havens! I can't forgive that."

"Well, before you told me so. You cannot devote your life to these people; and I love you too truly to accept the sacrifice, even if you made it gladly. We could not be happy with different aims or interests; and I cannot refuse to live among the poor who need me."

"Yet I am poor, and can do nothing worthy without you. Come, Ruth, this is a fad. Do look at it sensibly. You confess that you love me; yet you sacrifice me to a lot of — mere —"

"John!" Her voice was cold.

"Forgive me, dear. You are cruel. It is a hard place to put a man in. If you hated me, I could bear it more cheerfully."

"Please, John, do not say that. I should not be happy if I were to give up my work, and I know you would fret under an imposed obligation."

She gave him her trembling hand, and smiled through her tears. "Dear John, it is because I love you," she whispered. So they parted, not in tragic grief; for it was only another chapter in a story which both knew too well, and to which John was not yet prepared to write "Finis."



CHAPTER XXVI.

A WOUNDED NAME.

ALL summer the Club dues had been met without stress. Bank books had begun to show the habit of thrift and economy; for the primary idea of individual savings had been promptly adopted as soon as it was suggested. Mr. Parke believed saving to be a tonic to frugality and honesty, and was proud of the result of the experiment. Indeed, the amount of each boy's account was steadily increasing in proportion to his opportunity for earning, and the total sum saved by the Club itself in the first few months was considerable.

At the end of that time, however, something happened which gave Mr. Parke no little uneasiness. While the Club fees were deposited as usual for the month of October, to his surprise no private accounts were made over to him, al-

though he happened to know that the money had been collected as usual. After waiting a few days, he mentioned it to Ruth, and was still more surprised to see that it worried her. She advised him to ask Michele about it at once, and without hesitation, and also to consult Mrs. Trumbull. Puzzled and disappointed, the young man sought Michele. He colored and seemed confused, but offered no explanation, nor did he invite discussion. Unable to gain the boy's confidence, Mr. Parke had recourse to the Staff in council. Nobody wished to take the first step in discovering the truth ; so, with a sense of responsibility for the trust-fund, Mr. Parke cautiously questioned Nardo about the matter. And it must be owned that Nardo did not seem much surprised that his friend had failed to deposit the money. So indifferent, indeed, did Nardo appear, as to suggest complicity in the affair. It was a sorry little company that was closeted together that night. The boys had been quieter than usual, and had gone away early. Mrs. Trumbull had lost her brightness, and Ruth needed all her tact to keep up the fiction of confidence in the two boys.

"I am afraid we made a grave mistake in allowing Michele to act as treasurer, even for so small a sum," Mr. Parke said. "It was a great temptation to a boy who has had no moral discipline."

"I suppose we must look into the matter,

whether we wish to or not. But I confess myself wholly in fault for giving the fellow the chance to be dishonest," said Dr. Williams.

"What if he be proved guilty?" asked Mary Allen. "Should not his first offence be forgiven?"

"That seems to me a matter for the Club itself to decide," said Mr. Parke, sternly. He secretly wished he had never shared the story with the Staff, but had taken the matter into his own hands.

Mrs. Trumbull was silent. She thought of the letter. She seemed to hear Robert's voice as he pleaded to do something to make others as happy as he was. She blamed herself for putting Michele, unproved, where he should be so sorely tried, when she knew he had already fallen more than once.

Ruth stole a glance at Hannah, who was moving around the room uneasily. To her relief, however, the woman went out, and soon, through the unlatched door, they could distinctly hear : —

"Life is the time to serve the Lord,
The time to insure the great reward ;
And while the lamp holds out to burn,
The vilest sinner may return."

They could decide upon no definite line of action, so diverse were the opinions and suggestions offered. It was, however, tacitly under-

derstood that, before proceeding to stringent measures, they should wait until after the deposit for November was due. What then should be done remained to be seen.

"Make it 's easy fer him to confess, 's ye kin," urged Hannah, when Mrs. Trumbull and she talked it over together. "Don't make it wuss by tellin' everybody. I mus' c'nfess I admire to see folks stick the carpet full o' pins, p'int's up'most, an' then 'xpect a leetle feller to go bare-foot over 'em 'thout gittin' scratched. I never!"

Since Robert's recovery, no cloud had cast so dark a shadow upon Mrs. Trumbull's household, and it was gathering darker with every day. That there were fine traits in Michele's character, who could gainsay? True, it had taken the frost of adversity and the sun of prosperity to bring them out; but his devotion to Robert, his loyalty to Mrs. Finerty, his affection for Danny, went far to prove the latent nobility of soul with which all his friends were glad to credit him. Accepting his own statement that he had lost the letter, Ruth had believed him able to resist future temptation; and now came a bitter disappointment. Taken in connection with Michele's unexplained absences, which of late had been frequent, they all regarded his present course as a cause for serious anxiety.

The marriage ceremony had been set for the afternoon of Thanksgiving Day, when the drawing-room should be filled with sunshine. Only that

her mistress knew in what high esteem Hannah held this unused room, the wedding would have taken place in the library, where everybody felt so much at home. But Mrs. Trumbull would not even seem to withhold the best things from the woman whom she not only loved but honored.

"Harold, Harold dear! Please come and help me." The young folks were arranging a bower of greenery where the bridal party were to stand.

"Why not John dear?" asked Dr. Williams, hastening to her assistance.

"Can you untangle a knot?" Ruth asked, without looking at him.

"I can cut it, Ruthy. Will you let me, now?" He spoke under his breath, as they bent their heads over the tangled twine. She did not reply, but she knew that the back of her neck must be telling tales of her blazing cheeks.

"How good you are to everybody else! Bobby's 'happiness' stopped spreading before it got to me." He was not jesting now.

"Oh, John, pity me!" she entreated.

"I do, dear."

For some time they worked on in silence, deftly untangling the cord, while the others chaffed and teased, too busy to observe them.

"Miss Ruth, plaze 'll ye coom to granny, I dunno. She 's afther takin' bad an' can't shpake at all, 't all." Danny's round face was begrimed

with tears and dirt, and he panted for breath as if he had been running.

"Ill? Well, dear, run back and tell her I'll come at once."

"May I go with you, Ruth?" John's voice was steady and indifferent.

"By all means. You will be needed without doubt. I wonder what can be the matter!" she continued, with no apparent thought for anything but Mrs. Finerty's need of her. Ruth hurried away to get ready, while John paced up and down with a clouded face.

"Well, John, one would fancy it your aunt instead of that old — party, who needed your services," commented Will Allen.

John looked puzzled. "Why?" he asked.

"You looked so worried."

"Oh!"

"I would not be a physician if there were no other profession to choose," Mary said, after they were gone.

"Well, Ruth is just about as anxious as John," Will replied.

"Do you not sometimes wonder that they do not fall in love?" she ventured, thinking aloud. "They've been such friends all their lives."

"I have sometimes wondered if —" He stopped short. "Never mind, Mary, it's no use."

His sister glanced at him sharply.

"Will Allen! That never entered my mind."

"She is an angel."

"She is better than that. She is human — and good."

"I know there is n't the ghost of a chance for me, Mary, and I 'm not going to make a fool of myself by wearing my heart upon my sleeve."

"Oh, Will! I am so sorry you care —"

"Do not pity me. I hate it." But he kissed his sister's cheek and went out quickly.

John and Ruth found Mrs. Finerty really ill, and, like many another in the same condition, afraid of dying. Of course a priest had been sent for; but before he came, while pain was clutching her with relentless grip, she cried out for Ruth, on whom she had learned to lean for support. And Ruth, not for a moment believing her to be near her end, yet glad to comfort the poor soul, willingly lent an ear to her complaint.

"Och, me darlint!" she cried, "sure, it's me lasht wurds I 'm afther shpakin' till ye. Oi niver intinded to do the b'y anny harm whin Oi jusht shlipped the lettther out uv his pants-pocket to take care uv it for 'im. The saints be praised!"

"Where did he get the letter?" Ruth tried not to ask too eagerly.

"Divvle a bit does Oi know, mum, be the same token. Sure, Oi does be worrittin' me loife out o' me, day an' noight, fearin' the b'y 'll be goin' wrong; so Oi says to mesel', says Oi, 'Oi 'll

jusht perfect 'im wid lavin' it in me own boosom intoirely an' —' Och, honey ! Oi 'm afther goin', sure !" The poor old creature writhed in pain again, and Ruth patiently ministered to her. After the paroxysm had subsided, she ventured the question, —

"Was the letter open when you found it?"

"It was not, me dear, an' Oi would niver be openin' it for the warrld, becane me eyes is that poor Oi cannot read a wurrd."

"Well, where is it now?" asked Dr. Williams, with the air of one who expects an answer.

"That Oi cannot tell, surr, Hivin forgive me !"

"What did you do with it?"

"Well, surr, Oi does be axin' me friend Mrs. O'Hara could she read writin', an' Oi towld her Oi was afther findin' a letter wid a moornin' bordher which had a roight to be read, if so be it moight be imporrtant ; an' whiniver she see it, says she, ' Let me take it to me cousin that's a scholard,' says she, ' an' he 'll be afther makin' it out intoirely.' So, surr — Och ! murder ! Oh, docther, Oi 'm kilt intoirely !"

The doctor administered a soothing potion, and the old woman fell asleep.

Hannah was conventional or nothing, and it was by her wish that every member of the Staff, every boy in the Club, and Dr. Alexander, received a formal invitation to the wedding. It

was Hannah's desire, as Mrs. Finerty's attack did not prove fatal, that she also should be bidden; but the bright old woman declared that she had been brought up in a country where "Oi know me own place, thank God!" and declined. Hannah drew the line at a wedding journey which some one proposed.

"The Cap'n an' me, we ain't beggars, 'xac'ly, — not yit," she said; "but a weddin' journey's the fooliest way t' spend money, 'specially when ye 've got a palace ready 't yer hand, to take possession of. I never!"

A little while before the guests assembled, Hannah received a mysterious package, which she opened with trembling fingers.

"Well, if this don't beat all!" she cried, when at last she had removed its wrappers. "Mis' Trumbull, do look a-here. I never! Them little fellers orter be — I dunno what. If they hain't gone an' gi'n me a weddin' present! Well, I never 'n all my life! I dew declare!" With a blush, she displayed a life-size portrait-head of the Captain. "'With the comp'ments of The Young American Club' is printed butiful, and every blessed one on 'em has wrote his name too." Proudly she surveyed what was unquestionably the masterpiece of Michele, — not known as Angelo Buonarroto, but a very creditable performer, nevertheless.

"Jest look at thet there frame!" Hannah

went on. "I never! Why, Mis' Trumbull, it must have took every blessed cent them urchins could muster. Why, look a-here! Look a-here! Mercy on us! That's why Mike did n't bank none o' that money. I declare, I'm a 'most ashamed to take it. I can't keep from cryin' ter think 't after all Mike's honest, 'f 't is a bad sign ter shed tears on yer weddin' day. The Cap'n an' me, we both felt it in our bones 't that Italyun chap was 's honest 's we be, enny day, or we war n't no jedges o' human nater. Why, he warn't a mite more decomposed when I up an' spoke t' him 'bout it, 'n if I'd gi'n him a stick o' sugar candy. I never! Don't that go ter show how deep still waters can run? That's what I often tell the Cap'n."

How eagerly they all accepted Hannah's solution of the mystery. So anxiously had Robert been shielded from a knowledge of the facts, that now for the first time he was told of Michele's failure to deposit the trust funds.

"Oh, pshaw! I knew about the whole thing, all the time," he said; "for I stole the Cap'n's picture out of Hannah's hymn-book for Mike to copy. And did n't he do it well?" he added, capering about like any two-legged boy.

"Ye little rascal! So that 's where it went to, is it? An' I felt dretful, s'posin' I'd a lost it in church."

When it was Ruth's turn she produced the

"bit paper" which Mrs. Finerty had finally confessed to having extracted from the letter before intrusting it to her friend and familiar to take to her "cousin." And as that letter never came back to Mrs. Finerty,—Mrs. O'Hara pretending to have lost it,—the old woman proved her wisdom. Hannah's joy knew no bounds, and she was suffered to ring the changes on the theme of "I told you so," to her heart's content. Ruth and Robert were too glad for expression; and Mrs. Trumbull's kind eyes were wet with tears as she asked Robert's pardon for having distrusted his friend,—for, from this time forth, Michele was to be recognized as Robert's friend.

If the Captain was nautical on sea, on land he was ultra-marine. To Hannah's discomfiture, he openly admired her bridal "riggin'," advising her to "keep to leeward," lest he should "whip it to ribbons" with his clumsy feet. He counselled her to "heave to and cast anchor," when she bustled about a little ostentatiously, during the preliminary arrangements for the feast, and expressed the belief that "wimmen-folks orter take a reef in their sails when they start out on a long v'yge."

The hour for the ceremony came. Just at the supreme moment, when all eyes were turned in expectant curiosity toward the door every time it opened, somebody passed into the kitchen, where Spero was kept a temporary prisoner.

Seizing the opportunity, the little old dog came dashing through the opening with elfish glee. He passed down the line of waiting guests, successfully dodging many a wild snatch at his fluffy silken coat. Nor was he captured a minute too soon ; for Michele swooped down upon him inside the improvised chancel rail after the bridal party had entered the room, regardless of Ruth's detaining hand and the rector's frown.

To the question, "Ephraim, wilt thou have this woman to thy wedded wife?" the Captain proudly responded, "Ay, ay, sir!"

When Mrs. Trumbull tearfully gave away the bride, he acknowledged her good offices with, "Much obleeged to ye, mum." But the reality of losing Hannah so far outweighed all minor circumstances that nobody smiled or even felt amused. Robert was "best man," standing beside the Captain to hold the ring till it was wanted. As soon as Dr. Herrick had pronounced a benediction, the boy fell on Hannah's neck and wept, getting in return as motherly a hug as ever woman gave her own child.

Half an hour later, when she was giving the last critical inspection to the wedding feast, before the guests were bidden to partake, she lifted up her quavering voice in the strain, —

"Blest be the tie that binds
Our hearts in Christian love!
The fellowship of kindred minds
Is like to that above."

It is an easy matter to imagine Hannah the house-mother of Number 49 Tinkham street. Jacky loved to call her "grandmother," — poor Jacky, whom Hannah and the Captain took into their home as soon as they had one ! And was not the Captain himself always there, whittling toy ships as he tangled the boys' hearts in his endless sea-yarns ? For now that it was practicable, the Merrys kept open house, by day as well as by night, and there was room enough too for girls.

If Ruth ever sees her way clear to start a "settlement," even John Williams may well hesitate to defy the happy conjunction of circumstances which make it possible. And although a wider experience may serve to modify some of Ruth's youthful theories, who but John Williams can cavil if she shall still hold herself accountable for the "man who belongs nowhere?"

It must be owned that when Robert went to college, and Michele to another city to ply his burin, they carried off the biggest part of everybody's heart ; and it was only fair that the boys left behind them in return the lion's share of their own.

"Ye see, mom," — Hannah explained one day to a visitor at Number 49 Tinkham street, — "ye see that there motto over the chimbley-piece, 'Doe ye nexte thyng' ? Well, we all done the next thing, right 'long, 'thout waitin' t' see what 'd

happ'n. We done a leetle, an' a leetle more, an'
so on, till —

‘ . . . it came to be
In length and breadth the thickness that you see ;’

jest's old John Bunyan says he sot down the Pilgrim's Progress ; an' the fust thing we knowed, 't was all a-goin' like clock-work, an' we scurcely knowin' how. Like it? I never ! Why, we jest admire to do it, an' it's done *us* a grand sight more good too, — from fust to last, — 'n it has the boys and girls.”

THE END.





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